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A Case Study of the Institutional Elements of a University Sponsored Charter School: Urban School Reform in an Age of Accountability

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A Case Study of the Institutional Elements of a University Sponsored Charter School: Urban School Reform in an Age of Accountability

by

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my mother, Zenovia Hansel, and to my father, Everett M. Hansel, who taught me the value of hard work and commitment; and to my husband, Dr. Kelly Ward, an exemplary educator and supportive partner.

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I would like to thank and acknowledge the many educators who have influenced my understanding of teaching and learning, especially Dr. Ramona Trevino and the University Elementary School community for their support and extraordinary insight.

A Case Study of the Institutional Elements of a University Sponsored Charter School: Urban School Reform in an Age of Accountability

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The purpose of this study is to document and analyze patterns of institutional constraints and supports that emerge when an urban elementary school, sponsored by a local university, is conceived and created in a high-stakes accountability environment. The study considers the regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pressures placed upon the school in its early years. In its mission to provide a model of exemplary education to a minority population, it is influenced by institutions of governance, traditional schooling, the local community, the university, and others. The author documents the social and political context of the school's creation, in addition to the institutional pressures related to the school's regulatory environment, normative outlook, and cultural-cognitive beliefs and assumptions

This study uses New Institutional Theory as a framework for analyzing data from interviews, documents, and observations. The study is both a theoretical effort to demonstrate the value of New Institutional Theory in education research and a case study

which attempts to answer the question: In what ways is the elementary school constrained or enabled by the institutional nature of its creation and on-going effort to be a demonstration site for best practices for elementary level education in an urban setting?

This study provides a review of literature regarding New Institutional Theory and the many issues surrounding the current accountability movement. It also suggests avenues of research, including research for education policy development that may usefully address the needs of urban education today. The author aims to provide a case study that is rich enough in detail to provoke discussion of the challenges inherent in the creation of this new educational model, the university sponsored charter school in an urban environment. The author also wishes to draw a theoretical connection between the New Institutional Theory and the dynamics of teacher practice in today's political climate.

The case study exemplifies the difficulty of policy implementation when the policy is not designed inclusively. Policymakers need to be sensitive to a diversity of viewpoints and sub-cultures actively operating in the environment in order to develop policy that will build local capacity for increased learning and school improvement.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AYP	Adequate Yearly Progress, required by NCLB
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
IPG	Instructional Program Guide
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act of 2001
P-16	Public School/Higher Education Alignment Initiatives
SBR	Scientifically Based Research

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

BACKGROUND: CONTEXT AND ISSUES

In August, 2003, a large, research university in Texas opened an elementary charter school, the University Elementary School, for the purpose of demonstrating research-based best practices in an urban school environment. The School grew out of the consideration that schooling would benefit tremendously from tighter vertical alignment with higher education, from a more business minded approach to operations, and from the added competitive pressure that emerges from conditions of choice. The University System by action of its governing board authorized the creation of this particular School to meet the needs of a disadvantaged population and to contribute to the knowledge base of administrative and pedagogical research and practice. The Elementary School was part of a college readiness (P-16) initiative created by the University System entitled *Every Child, Every Advantage*. This initiative had three goals: (1) strengthening university-based teacher preparation programs, (2) creating high-quality training and instructional tools for public school teachers, and (3) initiating an aggressive research agenda (University of Texas System, 2002b). The P-16 Initiative was to stand as Texas's answer to the federally developed No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. Under the umbrella of the initiative's research agenda, the University System chartered the Elementary School for the purpose of demonstrating educational excellence with a particular focus on reading instruction.

The National Reading Panel convened in 1997, and the Reading First Initiative was well underway in Texas during the time the School was conceived. Much of the original purpose for creating an elementary school was to provide a place where Texas's approach to reading instruction could be demonstrated to educators interested in learning how it works. The reading initiative grew out of antipathy toward an exclusive use of the *whole language* approach and suggested that a balanced literacy would encompass the teaching of five components of reading: phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). A Houston-based study showed that children from disadvantaged backgrounds performed better when explicit, direct, systematic phonics instruction was taught first in their reading curriculum (Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, & Mehta, 1998). This conservative approach would help form the basis for acceptable pedagogical practice under the newly reauthorized NCLB Act of 2001.

This and related actions led to the development of the Reading First program, which was eventually authorized for use by NCLB. The Reading First program requires that federal monies be spent only on instructional approaches and methods backed by scientifically based research. The programs must include all five components mentioned above. Reading First critics, however, argue that this requirement focuses too heavily on skills-based instruction, ignoring other instructional methods and excluding qualitative research from the research base (Coles, 2003; Pressley, 2001). Not surprisingly, the program, with its billions of dollars in funding and consequences for so many children, has developed a political aspect that keeps it controversial.

The University System designed the University Elementary School to be a distinct answer to the woes of the public school system. In addition to a lack of scientifically based research, issues of huge demographic changes, apparent or purported lack of success by the traditional urban school, assertions of the need for parental choice, and other background forces combined to compel an argument in favor of the University System making a statement about how schooling should proceed for children who find themselves disadvantaged in terms of social and economic capital. See Appendix A for a demographic description of the University Elementary School.

Context: Standards Movement

The charter school concept developed in an era that honored standards and the idea that all children should face an expectation of high academic achievement. The underlying rationale for the standards movement was that excellence can be coupled with equity if the expectation of achievement is present for all children regardless of background. Academic standards describe what students should know and be able to do at their grade levels. Content standards describe the content required by core areas such as math, language arts, science, and social studies. Performance standards describe the level of performance required for various degrees of proficiency.

Public support for high standards is strong. A Business Roundtable (2000) poll said that a majority of Americans view the adoption of standards as "very much" in the right direction. An *Education Week* (2007) survey showed that 87% of teachers polled in 2000 felt that the standards based reform movement is headed in the right direction.

Context: Charter School Movement

The charter school movement was well underway at the time that the University System considered starting one itself. Charter schools are thought to be a way to provide educational choice and to experiment with innovative methods and approaches to instruction and administration in schools without the burden of the traditional school bureaucracy. There are currently about 4,000 charter schools in 40 states and the District of Columbia (Center for Education Reform, 2006). In 2004, more than half of the students enrolled in charter schools were from ethnic minority groups, about 12% required special education services, and about 6% were English language learners (Anderson, Adelman, Finnigan, Cotton, Donnelly, & Price, 2002). Further, the average charter school is considerably smaller than a traditional school (United States Department of Education, 2004). Charter schools frequently focus on a theme or particular instructional approach such as direct instruction or place special emphasis on a certain field of study such as technology or arts. Charters are attractive to many people because they have relatively more autonomy than other schools. Because of this same relative autonomy, they are of considerable concern to others who perceive the autonomy to be problematic. For example, the American Federation of Teachers (2002) has declared that many charter school sponsors fail to hold their charter schools accountable.

Charter Schools are created for various reasons. Bulkley, calling the movement an all things to all people reform, wrote:

> … the rhetoric of charter advocates can appeal to people with varied political viewpoints. Free market conservatives see them as a way to enhance competition in education and a step in the direction of vouchers. Teachers' union leaders such as the late Albert Shanker see them as a way to increase the power of teachers.

> Cultural conservatives hope that they will increase parental control over the values taught in schools their children attend, while those interested in restructuring schools see them as a way to further their goals. Moderate Democrats hope that charter schools will provide parental choice, competition and accountability while avoiding actual privatization through school vouchers (Bulkley, 2005, p. 527).

Local communities have become creative in their efforts to hinder the development of charter schools. Some districts require large bank accounts before issuing the charters. Other districts refuse to issue retirement checks for teachers who have worked for charters or require that the charter school applicants obtain signatures from union teachers before a non-union charter can be approved (Kirst, 2006). However, states have begun to authorize chartering agencies such as state education agencies, universities, and mayors (Vergari, 2002). In the case of the Elementary School, the charter was granted to the University System and then delegated to the flagship university. This university-sponsored charter was made possible by new state legislation passed in 2001 referred to as Subchapter E. The sponsoring University was first to take advantage of the new legislation. Subsequently, the University Elementary School became the first Subchapter E open-enrollment university-sponsored charter school in the state.

Context: Accountability Movement, NCLB

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The ESEA was first enacted in 1965 during the height of President Johnson's War on Poverty. NCLB includes Title I, which

is the federal government's program for disadvantaged students. Expanding the federal role in education considerably, the Act focuses on: (1) annual testing of students according to state standards, (2) academic progress (Adequate Yearly Progress, or "AYP") of all student populations with sanctions for failure, (3) state report cards showing student achievement by sub-group and by district-wide groupings, (4) teacher qualifications requiring that every teacher in core content areas be highly qualified, (5) Reading First, for which NCLB created a competition for funds to help states set up scientifically based reading programs for early elementary school children, and (6) funding changes giving states flexibility in how they spend their federal monies.

Many educators do not believe that the NCLB Act is helpful to the state of education. In 2003, a Public Agenda opinion poll showed that almost half of high school principals and superintendents considered the Act to be politically motivated or aimed at undermining public schools. Others suggest that the law disproportionately penalizes schools with diverse populations (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). Further, many analysts and educators perceive the law to be an under-funded mandate. The law is controversial even though it was originally supported by both Republicans and Democrats.

Issue: Scientifically Based Research

According to NCLB, federally funded programs must be grounded in *scientifically based research* (SBR) so that children may benefit from proven programs and practices. NCLB has defined SBR as research involving systematic, rigorous, and

objective procedures designed to extract reliable, valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs. SBR employs systematic empirical methods and rigorous data analyses; relies on methods that provide valid data across evaluators, observations, and studies; is evaluated using experimental or quasi-experimental designs; and ensures that studies are presented in adequate detail and have been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or panel of experts (NCLB, 2001, Section 9101(37)(A)). The SBR requirement is significant to the analysis of this case study. The University Elementary School was created, in part, to demonstrate scientifically based research.

Issue: Best Practice, Evidence Based Practice

The idea of *best practices* has been around at least since the time of Frederick W. Taylor (1916). His technocratic concept that there is a single best way to perform a task has influenced the development of management theory for many decades. However, the American Productivity and Quality Center suggests a definition of best practices using the following complementary themes:

1. Transfer is a people-to-people process; meaningful relationships precede sharing and transfer;

2. Learning and transfer is an interactive, ongoing, and dynamic process that cannot rest on a static body of knowledge. Employees are inventing, improvising, and learning something new every day; and

3. Benchmarking stems from a personal and organizational willingness to learn. A vibrant sense of curiosity and a deep respect and desire for learning are the keys to success (American Productivity and Quality Center, 2007).

A consideration of best practices in schooling must include an understanding of the human element and the idea of learning as a dynamic activity.

However, it is not clear that this is the notion held by most supporters of NCLB and SBR. Indeed, the neighboring school district, which supplies many of the University Elementary School's teachers, provides Instructional Program Guides (IPGs) which, according to the school district office, offer a standard curriculum that is tightly aligned with state standards and that ensures reliable, quality instruction for each grade, each subject, and each school. Further, these IPGs include "instructional guidance regarding pacing of instruction, research-based best practices including the Principles of Learning, methodologies, instructional resources, assessment strategies, descriptions of student work, and discipline/course specific teacher notes" (Austin Independent School District, 2005, pp. 16-17). Pressures toward standardization, tight alignment, performance outcomes, and cost effectiveness encourage school districts and state education agencies to view best practices in ways that approach the old Taylorism. This dissertation evaluates the various viewpoints concerning practice and their effects on schooling.

Issue: School-University Partnerships

School-university partnerships have developed over the past few decades in answer to the need for inquiry and research that is related to practice and real world practical problems of schooling. Broadly speaking, this issue includes basic research on topics such as cognition, student behavior, and teacher learning. But more frequently, the partnerships involve topical, contemporary issues of teaching disadvantaged populations in our current, high-accountability environment. Schools supply students to the universities, and the universities supply teachers to the schools. With this kind of

interdependence, one might assume that there would be a great deal of interaction. Interaction in the form of P-16 initiatives, such as the one that incubated the case study school, has developed fairly rapidly. However, universities and schools have differing cultures, missions, and structures (Miller & Silvernail, 1994) which have created obstacles and barriers to effective partnerships.

THE NEW INSTITUTIONALISM

Schooling is a complex and challenging field of activity (Boyd, 1991; Cibulka & Boyd, 2003). Understanding it requires a theoretical lens that is at once comprehensive—able to consider the major elements of the field—and, at the same time, focused in a way that helps to draw the connections among these elements. The institutional environment in which the case study school is embedded constitutes an excellent example of the complexity of schooling.

The researcher is particularly interested in the constraints and enablers inherent in what Scott (2001) calls the three conceptions of the New Institutionalism: "Regulative systems, normative systems, cultural-cognitive systems—each of [which] has been identified by one or another social theorist as a vital ingredient of institutions" (p. 51). This conceptual framework promises to shed light on the answer to the general primary research question: In what ways is the University Elementary School constrained or enabled by the institutional nature of its creation and on-going effort to function as a demonstration site of best practices for elementary-level education?

The regulative complexity, for example, is exhibited by the School's policy manual which reflects rules from the University Board of Regents, laws from the Texas Education Code, rules from the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Administrative Code, and the University Handbook of Operating Procedures, including Human Resources, Accounting, and Maintenance (University of Texas Elementary School, 2006a). The normative complexity is exhibited by the multiple values and norms of the public school teachers, administrative staff, and parents now filling roles that are frequently not different from the ones they had in a prior traditional school experience. The cultural-cognitive complexity of the various populations and their views of the world and of their communities variously demonstrate themselves in Parent Forum meetings, Board meetings, and during student drop-off and pick-up. Complexity abounds, but the connections among the many players, situations, institutions, and contexts are often hidden from ordinary view. An institutional analysis helps to uncover these relationships and pressures, supports and constraints.

STATEMENT OF THESIS

There is widespread concern that education professionals should be doing a better job of sharing evidence-based practices among practitioners and researchers (National Research Council, 2005) with corresponding calls for education research and education practice to work together more closely to produce useful theory and research-based practice. The question becomes: How should this objective be accomplished, and in what manner might it be most successful? Consideration must be given not only to what works

but also to the discontinuities between research and practice in education. An institutional analysis may shed light on this issue. An understanding of the institutional environment can clarify many causes of unintended consequences of education policy. Given an analysis of the institutionalism inherent in schooling, unintended consequences will be less frequent and fidelity to policy design will be greater.

Teachers, schools, and districts need to share *what works*. More must be known about what is really happening as attempts are made to share practice. Why are practices sometimes transferable and other times not? Teachers vary in their instructional practice, depending, in part, upon how they interpret internal and external pressures, such as the mandate to implement best practices reform in their classrooms. Are they concerned about their professional appraisals? Do they feel forced to follow the practice guidelines? Or, perhaps, do they regard the requirement for new practice as a potential enhancement of their capacity to teach and the children's capacity to learn? Spillane and others (Spillane & Callahan, 2000; Spillane & Jennings, 1997; Spillane & Zeuli, 1999) recently researched some of the causes of the breach between education policy and its implementation at state, school district, school, and classroom levels. They found that local policy leaders think about the issues somewhat differently from the way that policy makers expect, and also differently from one another. The policy implementation process follows various paths, depending on *local understanding* or cognition of the policy issues. Policy design is necessarily somewhat abstract in an effort to be applicable to many venues (Majone & Wildavsky, 1978). It is this very abstraction, however, that opens the floodgates of diverse interpretations. The process is further complicated by the

human tendency to understand the aspects of a situation in the terms that one already knows from personal experience. Knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes frame the issues. These understandings are often superficial and miss the point of the policy's intent. Hence, the policy may be poorly implemented or ignored altogether. As Lindblom (1977) wrote, "The human condition is small brain, big problems" (p. 66).

In this case study the challenge is to uncover the institutional pressures and supports placed upon the School as an organization charged with the responsibility to serve as a model of best practices. Specifically, the question to be asked is: What are the regulative, normative, and cognitive pressures that shape the organization and culture of schooling in the University Elementary School, and what impact do these forces have on the School's ability to fulfill its mission?

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this dissertation is to assess the organizational context of the University Elementary School with a particular emphasis on the institutional pressures and supports applied to it. Such an assessment is assumed to shed light on the situation in which the School finds itself. The School itself is an organization, but it is embedded in a rich environmental context defined by many kinds of institutions: political, economic, social, and cultural. It is important to note that there are theoretical and practical differences between what is viewed as *organizational* versus what is viewed as *institutional*. Organizational theory has developed over the past several decades from a view of the organization as free standing and rationally organized to one of perceiving it

as heavily influenced by the complexity of human participants in an equally complex environment. Organizational theory blurs the boundaries of organizations and their environments by appreciating the interactive nature between organizations and their environments. The boundaries and definitions are not always clear nor agreed upon. To be sure, the definition of terms and their use is a significant part of the literature. There is considerable discussion and some disagreement about the terms and concepts. Scott (forthcoming) has written that the New Institutional Theory, having finally survived the early adolescent and teenage years, is entering young adulthood. This assertion implies that the theory is still developing and is only now approaching maturity. This study discusses terms and definitions further at the end of this chapter.

RESEARCH

Purpose

The purpose of the research is to uncover the nearly invisible pressures and supports borne by the Elementary School in its effort to serve as a demonstration site of best practices in elementary education for disadvantaged populations. Understanding these constraints and enablers may help the School be more useful as a model of practice. Additionally, this research may serve as a demonstration of the theory's usefulness and, by extension, help other researchers use this theoretical lens in educational research. This study of the institutional environment faced by an elementary school responsible for the requirements of *scientifically based* practices is meant to: (1) provide a rich case study of what is a relatively new educational model—a university-sponsored charter school

designed to share expertise from the university and to demonstrate best practices in its design and operations, (2) help provide a theoretical connection between New Institutional Theory and the dynamics of evidence-based practices in today's political climate, and (3) provide qualitative research in support of the use of the New Institutional lens in educational change.

Context

Schools are facing a remarkable surge in the minority and immigrant populations, persistence in the poverty of inner city schools, and on-going divides between the achievement levels of primarily suburban, white, middle-class schools and schools serving most of the rest of the population. The National Center for Children in Poverty (2007) reports that 28 million children in the United States live in low-income households. Besides poverty, these youth and their families face numerous additional barriers—language and cultural issues, violent neighborhoods, discrimination, low levels of parental education, and unstable legal status. The highest rates of poverty prevail among African Americans (30%) and Hispanics (28%) (Goldstein & Brooks, 2006). Immigrant children and children born of immigrants represent the most rapidly growing part of our under-18 population at 4.5 times the rest of the population. The majority of these immigrants come from Mexico and other Latin American countries (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; United States Census Bureau, 2001). This societal complexity requires an understanding of the links among many significant institutions—economic, political,

social, and cultural—with a focus on understanding the institutional regulations, norms, and cultures.

We live in a time of rapidly changing demographics. The central Texas region has grown tremendously in recent decades (Community Action Network, 2006). The population of children in Texas is growing faster than in any other state. This demographic group is expected to double by 2040. In addition, the Hispanic population will increase by 48% from 2000 to 2010, much faster than other racial/ethnic groups (Murdock, 2006). Our nation faces similar demographic realities. In 2004, the racial and ethnic make-up of public schools was 57% white, 16% black, 19% Hispanic, and 7% other. These statistics represent a sharp decrease in the white percentage from 78% in 1972, and a strong increase in Hispanic from 6%. The percentage of children ages 5 to 17 in the United States who speak a language other than English at home rose from 9% in 1979 to 19% in 2004 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).

Another significant change is that the regulatory environment has become federalized in important ways with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Societal demands for accountability of learning outcomes produced by public schools have increased greatly. Society is asking that solutions be found to the problems of low academic performance and that the achievement gap between the disadvantaged populations and the middle- and upper-classes be reduced and eventually eliminated.

Questions

The research questions emanate from the theoretical framework used in this study. The framework was developed by Scott (2001) to make sense of the many strands of what is now called the New Institutional Theory. In surveying the past 40 years of organizational theory and organizational development, Scott categorized the various themes in three groups: structures, norms, and beliefs. Consequently, the research questions fall into these three categories:

1. What are the regulative/structural elements of the School's institutional environment and what effect do they have on the School's mission and purpose?

2. What are the normative/value-driven elements of the School's institutional environment and what effect do they have on the School's mission and purpose?

3. What are the cultural-cognitive elements of the School's institutional environment and what effect do they have on the School's mission and purpose?

THE STUDY

Significance

This research is potentially important to educators and researchers in their efforts to understand the process of how instructional and administrative innovation focused on disadvantaged populations may be enacted in a strong institutional environment during times of high accountability. Demographics show that the economic divide between the white and minority populations, and between the wealthy and poor, are growing larger every year. The challenges of educating children from diverse cultures and from difficult

socio-economic backgrounds will increase in similar proportions. Arellano and Padilla (1996) identify the greatest threats to Hispanic students as poverty, low rate of parental education, English language learning challenges, and low academic expectations. While research has shown that low socio-economic status has a highly negative effect on student achievement (Elias et al., 1997; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000), schools offer one of the best venues for helping children develop the resiliency they need to overcome some or all of these barriers (Johnson, Livingston, Schwartz, & Slate, 2000).

This study may be able to help the School and the University in their efforts to provide a model of practice for elementary school education for disadvantaged populations and a model of university-sponsored K-12 education. The researcher seeks to present a description and analysis of the School that is rich enough to provoke thought and evoke consideration of the opportunities and pitfalls inherent in starting a university sponsored charter elementary school.

Limitations

All the limitations inherent in any case study apply to this one as well. The study's description and analysis are focused on a single school. Another school or situation may benefit from this study, but this study is not a blueprint. Rather, it is a narrative analysis and theoretical discussion of the Elementary School and how the institutional pressures and supports are placed upon the School as a site of best practices. Nevertheless, researchers, analysts, policy-makers, and others may learn from case analyses of this type. It is possible to learn from a single case and apply the learning to

other cases or situations. However, it is important to situate the generalization, or adapt the learning, to the context of the case at hand.

Organization

This dissertation has six chapters: Introduction; Theoretical Framework; Literature Review; Methodology; Findings: Regulative Elements, Normative Elements, and Cultural-Cognitive Elements; and, Interpretation and Implications.

The study begins with Chapter 1, an introduction and background to the dissertation research. The first chapter reviews the creation of the Elementary School and its purpose, the political and social context of the institution of schooling, the applicable theoretical framework, statement of thesis, purpose of the study, research purpose, research context, research questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study, the organization of the dissertation, the terms, and concluding remarks. The second chapter introduces the New Institutional Theory and its applicability to the analysis of public schooling. The third chapter reviews the literature with an emphasis on issues and contextual aspects of the current accountability movement. The fourth chapter outlines and describes the case study methodology. The fifth chapter discusses findings. The first part looks at the regulative elements of the case. The second part considers the normative elements. The third part rounds out the findings with an assessment of the cultural-cognitive foundation of the School. The final brings the argument together to discuss what this study means for the School and for schooling in general, and the final section of the last chapter reviews implications for policy and areas for future research.

TERMS

This dissertation uses a number of key words or phrases in ways generally accepted by sociologists, educational researchers, and others to describe the concepts and entities of analysis. Following are the key terms that are employed in this report:

- *Balanced Instruction* is a term used by the author to describe a pedagogical approach that uses various instructional strategies depending on the individual student needs and proposed instructional outcomes.
- *Constructivism* is theory of learning which states that the learner constructs his or her own understanding based on prior knowledge and experience. Constructivist learning is considered by theorists to be personally constructed and/or socially mediated (Windschitl, 2002).
- *Best Practices, exemplary practice, and evidence-based practice* refer to the idea that there are practices that have proven themselves to work particularly well, sometimes under specific circumstances.
- *Direct, explicit, systematic instruction* is an instructional approach that includes such features as "(1) teaching in small steps, (2) providing guidance during initial practice, (3) having students practice after each step, and, (4) ensuring a high level of success" (Lang & Evans, 2006, p. 342). Hall (2002) writes that essential components include the following: pacing, processing opportunity, frequent student responses, monitoring responses, and feedback.

- *Environment* is everything that is outside the boundaries of the organization or organizational groupings. There are two primary types of environments: material resource environments and institutional environments. “For a given system, the environment is the set of all objects a change in whose attributes affect the system and also those objects whose attributes are changed by the behavior of the system” (Hall & Fagen as cited in Scott, 2003, p. 125).
- *Institutional logics* refer to “practices and symbolic constructions which constitute organizing principles and which are available for organizations and for individuals to elaborate” (Friedland & Alford, 1991, p. 248).
- *Institutionalization* is the process whereby an organization becomes “infused with value beyond the technical requirements at hand” (Selznick, 1957, p. 17).
- *Institutions* are “composed of cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life” (Scott, 2001, p. 48). Institutions are not synonymous with organizations (see below).
- *Isomorphism* is a condition in which “organizations attempt to enhance their chances for survival and resource acquisition by adhering closely to institutionally defined patterns, by incorporating them into their own structures, and by becoming structurally isomorphic with them” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

- *Legitimacy* is a "generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574).
- *Loose coupling* is a concept demonstrated when "organizations respond to institutional pressures selectively and decouple their formal structures from the activities carried on in their technical core" (Meyer and Rowan, 1977).
- *Organizational field* refers to "those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and produce consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services and products" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 148).
- *Organizations* are highly formalized, socially embedded systems oriented toward the attainment of their goals. This definition includes what Scott (2003) refers to as rational, natural, and open systems perspectives.
- *Scientifically based research (SBR),* as defined by the NCLB Act (2001) is "research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs" (NCLB, Section 9101(37) (A)).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This dissertation evaluates the institutional forces inherent in the case study School's context of being a university-sponsored charter school designed to demonstrate best practices for disadvantaged populations during times of politically prescribed

demands of accountability in school systems. The researcher engages Scott's (2001) three-part schema that highlights the pressures related to regulation/structure, norms/values, and culture/cognition. The case study is limited in the manner of all case studies in that it cannot be used as a blueprint *per se*, but it may be useful for the ideas and suggestions it offers to other university-sponsored charter schools and urban elementary schools. The study uses a number of terms that are generally employed by sociologists and other social sciences, but which are defined in this chapter to help the reader understand the author's research and analysis.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE NEW INSTITUTIONALISM

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework that has been used for the analysis of the charter school and its early years. An overarching purpose of this chapter is to highlight the value of the current New Institutional Theory and its power to interpret the use of best practices as a change agent in restructuring and re-culturing (Fullan, 1993) public education today. The chapter begins with an introduction to the foundations of institutionalism. Next, the seminal works (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Scott, 1983; Meyer, Scott, & Deal, 1992; Rowan & Miskel, 1999; Scott, 2001; Suchman, 1995) are assessed for their usefulness in analyzing public education reform. Finally, issues regarding the need for institutional agility are addressed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE NEW INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

Consideration of schooling as an institution is a multifaceted and demanding concern (Boyd, 1991; Cibulka & Boyd, 2003) compounded by current rapid rates of social and demographic change. The absolute magnitude of stakeholders and interest groups involved and the escalation of dollars employed illuminate the increasing significance of education in contemporary society. Intense and complex concerns propel us toward certain urgent, fundamental questions. What prevents effective and substantive

reform in our public schools despite generations of putative efforts (Cuban, 1990; Rusch, 2005)? Why are urban schools ineffective in comparison to neighboring suburban schools (Noguera, 2003)? What measures support change in educational institutions? Given their civic obligations, how can public schools become vibrant, caring centers of learning for all students (Nieto, 1999; Noddings, 2005a; Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner, 1999)?

The New Institutionalism offers key insights in our understanding of the institution of schooling through consideration of structure, norms, processes, and socially created realities (Meyer & Rowan, 1992; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). How does society affect education *as an institution*? This issue is important in view of new federal and state mandates contending for control and leadership with traditional forces at the local level. It is important, therefore, to examine how New Institutional Theory can be used to better understand these complex issues.

Foundation of the New Institutionalism

The New Institutionalism evolved from the recognition that organizations are open systems with permeable boundaries and a concomitant susceptibility to environmental interaction (Scott, 2003). This environmental interaction, presaged by Easton in *A Framework for Political Analysis* (1965), is central to understanding the social and political contexts of organizations. The environment shapes organizations and institutions in complex and multiple ways. At the same time, organizations and institutions interpret, respond to, and adapt to their many-layered environments. The shift from closed to open systems conceptualization in the study of organizations was a

watershed event in the social sciences that changed our way of viewing organizations and their environments (Scott, 2001). While they are open with permeable boundaries, organizations are also highly formalized, socially embedded systems bounded, in part, by their efforts to achieve specific goals. By extension, the environment is everything that is outside those permeable boundaries of organizations or organizational groupings (Scott, 2005). Institutionalism bridges the concepts of both organization and environment. Further, various organizations can and regularly do combine to comprise what amounts to institutional environments. Such combined institutional environments, or organizational fields, frequently obscure boundaries such as those blurred lines surrounding schools and their related entities and stake holding groups. In the *institution of schooling*, these organizational fields are truly significant forces.

The term *institution* is not synonymous with the term *organization*. Scott (2001) describes institution as "composed of cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life" (p. 48). For example, the institution of the family, with its patterns, norms, and expectations of protection and care, coupled with our assumptions and beliefs of what it means to be in a family, including the legal requirements for appropriate behavior in family life, provide us with a constancy and reliability that enhance our lives. By contrast, an individual family or group of families may be considered an organization. The institution of family is a broader concern distinguished by its larger field and multiple elements.

The elements, pressures, and supports of institutions are often difficult to identify. Nonetheless they are important to the outcomes and condition of societal organizations. There is an active interplay among organizations and institutions operating in the environment. Depending on the level of analysis, organizations together may make up an institution, such as the institution of schooling. Organizations themselves are more clearly bounded by goals, objectives, and plans. Institutions develop and evolve in a more fluid manner. For the institution of schooling to change dramatically, many organizations would have to change in the process. Organizations are defined in part by the institutions they relate to, and they are defined in large measure by the external organizations with which they must participate. The New Institutionalism captures this interplay by providing a comprehensive, systemic analytical framework of organizations, institutions, and their environments.

The organizational actors that constitute the institution of schooling are highly varied. They include political, for-profit, professional, and community participants. The political interest groups and government agencies range from federal through state down to local levels of government. The for-profit stakeholders include suppliers of instructional materials such as textbooks, training and tutoring services, and transportation, maintenance, and back-office services. Professional organizations encompass teachers, experts, think tanks, associations, and advocacy groups. Community activists and local citizens include families, community members, business leaders, and local parent-teacher organizations. Each of these diverse actors manifests divergent perspectives, interests, and values with respect to both the political and social spheres of

schooling (Mazzoni, 1995). Moreover, actors wield differing degrees of power and differing wills to assert such power. Official knowledge and appropriate behavior depend heavily, perhaps decisively, on dominant societal values and pervading epistemologies (Apple, 2006). These pervading notions determine such issues as how science books address evolution or what view of history social studies texts support. These dominating groups select among the available reading programs, for example, as they determine which suppliers conduct business with districts. Lasswell (1958) put it aptly when he defined politics as *who gets what, when and how*. His definition is as valid today, and applies to schooling as much as it does to explicitly political bodies.

Early Formulations

To address the power of institutions and organizational environments, the first articulations of New Institutionalism by Meyer and others (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1991; Meyer, Scott, & Deal, 1981; Zucker, 1977) identified a need for analysis beyond task-oriented behaviors. These task-oriented behaviors are the specific behaviors required to accomplish an organization's goals (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967/1986), and understanding such task behaviors is of serious moment. Even so, understanding an organization's task behaviors is insufficient without full consideration of the context of the organization's environment. Meyer and Rowan, possessing an empirically sound understanding of organizations and their foundational need for legitimacy, contended that "the formal structures of many organizations in post-industrial society (Bell, 1973) dramatically reflect the *myths* of their institutional environments

instead of the demands of their work activities" (Meyer & Rowan, 1991, p. 41). DiMaggio and Powell (1991), endeavoring to explain the emergence of institutions and to examine whose interests those institutions serve, used this fresh formulation to enumerate and evaluate three processes of social reproduction that cause institutions and organizations to become isomorphic—i.e. to become increasingly similar to one another. The mechanisms of isomorphic change thus isolated are coercive, mimetic, and normative.

Isomorphic Change: Coercive, Mimetic, and Normative

Coercive isomorphism results from external pressures by external organizations or from societal, cultural expectations that the organization must behave in particular ways. Persuasion or more formal legal power and authority may be the instruments of coercion, depending on the particular case. The requirement that special education students be included in regular education classes, for example, is a coercive force that causes a school, through the actions of its professionals over time, to become more and more like other schools responding to the same pressure.

Environmental uncertainty, an apt characterization of the crisis condition of urban education today, produces a mimetic response. *Mimetic isomorphism* is a mechanism that is used by organizations that lack clarity regarding technology, task, or even purpose. The solutions of well-regarded organizations are copied in an effort to mimic effective strategies. In an environment of uncertainty, mimetic isomorphism might, for example,

express itself in the form of a culturally acceptable model suggested by a prestigious university.

The third mechanism of convergent change, *normative isomorphism*, relates to what education professionals should know, as well as how they ought to be and act, and it operates through accreditation, certification, and other institutional processes oriented toward professionalizing educators' roles. Such internalization of core values in schooling is observable in the replication of look-alike classrooms across the United States, for example, along such parameters as standard division of classrooms by grade and age with typical teacher-student ratios.

Analytical Power of the New Institutionalism

The New Institutionalism, frequently referred to as *neo-institutionalism*, discerns the tremendous power of broader social concerns and societal connections of organizations, thus differentiating itself from the earlier institutional theory. According to Powell and DiMaggio (1991), environments penetrating organizations create "lenses through which actors view the world and the very categories of structure, action, and thought" (p. 13).

Two examples, the political impact of textbook adoption on classroom instruction and student learning, and the power of the *hidden curriculum*, illustrate this environmental penetration of organizations and institutions. A specific textbook, selected because it meets the needs of a school-wide majority, may be quite inadequate for special education students or for second language learners. Such school-wide decisions servicing

the majority often follow highly politicized textbook adoption processes. The textbook industry, state legislatures, state education agencies, and local districts all contribute to such politicization through a proliferation of statutes, procedures, policies, rules, and purposes.

In the second example, communities assert their dominant cultures through their teachers in the form of a *hidden curriculum*. How do teachers engage students, and which students do they engage? How do teachers facilitate group studies, and who do they expect to produce excellent work? On surface, these questions possess apparent innocence, but the undercurrent manifests a struggle over who has and who gets power.

Social Reproduction

Many theorists suggest that dominant groups reproduce their societal perspectives through education and other institutions (Apple, 2006; Spring, 2002). While individual mental models are largely socially constructed as organizational actors operate within the limits of a *bounded rationality* (Simon, 1997), differing perspectives may cause individuals and groups to have divergent boundaries and heterogeneous, dissonant, understandings. The presence of difference may be a disruptor of isomorphic and reproductive forces in the institution of schooling. In an era of destabilization and change, the neo-institutional framework effectively supports analysis of schooling through a social-cultural focus. Schooling is ripe for analysis using this framework. Urban schooling, with its increasing concentration of students from mixed cultural and ethnic backgrounds, is especially well-positioned for the neo-institutional lens.

Multiple Levels of Analysis

Institutions and organizations are highly complex entities that resist unitary or one-dimensional analysis. Ferreting out and deciphering the many connections among organizational actors requires multiple levels of analysis. The institutional approach spans the entire range from the individual to the global levels. Such an approach discovers the several forces—regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive—that guide actors and organizations at multiple levels. At a basic level of organizational examination, analysis might focus on the individual's role as a primary agent or actor. This basic level provides a social-psychological-cognitive approach. A researcher gains a better understanding of the *institutional* nature of the role of a teacher, for example, by examining that teacher's perception and understanding of team planning. Important organizational, social, and political implications for a school community may result from institutional support for teacher collaboration. Such collaboration both inside and outside the classroom could effectively shift the balance of power from administration to faculty by effecting true teacher leadership.

Structural features, processes, and goals are the focus at the organizational level. This focus questions a school's governance, what types of activities occur and what procedures are in place, and how goals relate to operations. In recent decades, schools have attempted very deliberately to implement site-based management. Examining these efforts using institutional theory offers an opportunity to analyze the devolution of power at different sites. Is the site truly autonomous? Or, has it been given responsibility

without authority? Is the site held accountable without being afforded real decision-making power or adequate resources?

The level of the *organizational field* evaluates the behaviors of the organization as a "collective entity operating in a larger system of relations" (Scott, 2003, p. 17). The organizational field, also known as the *sector* level, is defined as "those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, pp. 64-65). DiMaggio (1986) later noted that "the organizational field has emerged as a critical unit bridging the organizational and societal levels in the study of social and community change" (p. 337). Working from this understanding allows researchers to build constructs recognizing the essential embeddedness of organizations in their environments. Looking at laptops versus textbooks as a way of delivering the content required by state standards would be an example from the education sector. Research into the commercial sector of computer manufacturers and textbook publishers and how they interact with legislative, education agency, and district decision makers is an example of the institutional view at the inter-organizational level. Inquiring into the relative levels of power, for example, a researcher may be interested in whether a specific district had more or less power than a potential textbook publisher. Another example might be how an expanded view of inter-organizational players, including neighborhood organizers, could change one's perspective on the boundaries of the institution of schooling.

Rational Myths and Legitimacy

There is a notable regularity in schools and school organizations. What drives this remarkable regularity? Why has schooling survived as it is currently configured? Perhaps this configuration persists because of the dominant perspectives of powerful social and political groups willing and able to defend their common perspectives and interests. Meyer and Rowan (1991) tendered a clarifying lens. They claimed that schools and districts are accepted as *legitimate* on the basis of conformity with societal expectations. Legitimacy does not derive solely from accountability performance or outcomes. They argued that schools had been allowed to proceed with little scrutiny of the specificities of how teaching and learning were actually being done. This free pass emanated from a mythical *professionalism* arising from the preparation, certification, and qualifying processes for teachers. Organizations, separating or *decoupling* the processes, relied heavily on ceremonies and institutional myths to ensure legitimacy and viability—i.e. funding and survival (Meyer & Rowan, 1991). These myths tend to support the dominant view.

However, differentiated treatment of student sub-groups frequently exposes popular schooling myths. The myth of the Common School, of equal availability of equitably resourced schooling for all, and the myth of meritocracy—rife with assertions of high expectations—are exposed for what they are, politically potent myths. Noddings (2003) suggests that these myths may be another way of imposing outcomes on students who are at different stages of readiness, causing students who are not developmentally or

linguistically ready to be treated in a standardized, formally equal (though not equitable) fashion.

Schools and districts must comport with society's expectations of legitimate behavior for schools. These are expectations that school managers dare not ignore on their tightrope between their organizational goals and their concerns for survival and legitimacy. Suchman (1995) defines *legitimacy* as the "assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" (p. 574). Through compliance with the beliefs and patterns commonly accepted in the broader society, schools have historically achieved legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1978).

Loose Coupling

Schools engender legitimacy with the community, thereby guaranteeing survival by structuring themselves to conform to societal rules and beliefs (Meyer et al., 1981). Schools have partially insulated themselves from many environmental demands but at the same time have retained core activities, school culture, and legitimacy. They have achieved this buffering by decoupling their technical core from their institutional environment. *Loose coupling* implies that there are relatively autonomous units in an organization (March & Olsen, 1976; Orton & Weick; 1990; Weick, 1976; Weick, 2001). Classrooms, for example, are not tightly coupled with the school's other units or with the school as a whole. Teachers express professional judgment while ostensibly maintaining

effective performance. Theorists and analysts use this model widely to describe education in the United States.

Because of increased emphasis on performance outcomes, educational organizations today are becoming more tightly coupled (Fusarelli, 2002), a condition promising continuing change to the educational landscape. "The extent of coupling is a matter of context—and in the U.S. context, the tightness of coupling is far greater than at any other time in our history" (Fusarelli, 2002, p. 571). How much coupling is appropriate? What kind of coupling should it be? In some situations such as for a local population or specific need—or for a particular activity requiring flexibility—looser coupling may be appropriate. On the other hand, consistency and management improvement often suggest tighter coupling. *Loose* and *tight* are relative terms. Different educational contexts and functions require differing degrees of both coupling and flexibility.

According to recent educational administration literature, schools function in both a technical and an institutional environment (Rowan & Miskel, 1999). Because schools have had relatively weaker technical environments compared to traditionally strong normative and regulative environments, *teaching* and *learning* have remained largely uninspected (Scott & Meyer, 1991). The accountability movement seems to be readjusting these environmental relationships. The external, environmental pressures of No Child Left Behind have tightened coupling related to instruction. The emphasis on direct, explicit instruction fits well with the standardized assessments favored by the NCLB Act. Certain aspects of the technical environment have increased in strength due

to the "emergence of powerful new institutional actors; and an emerging institutional capacity, coupled with isomorphic processes which encourage tighter coupling" (Fusarelli, 2002, p. 562). In order to assess their success in meeting the demands for reducing achievement gaps mandated by NCLB accountability pressures for performance, states have instituted high-stakes testing. This situation brings into sharp focus for researchers and practitioners the question of whether loose coupling of the formal organization and the technical core continues to yield a requisite level of legitimacy for schools.

SCOTT'S CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Scott (2001) has configured a framework with three strands of institutionalism—regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive. They vary considerably in their notions of the nature of reality and in their ways of knowing. The regulative strand coerces action by invoking legally sanctioned rules and laws. New state activism and current tendencies toward increasing federalism are the emphases and *foci* of this overtly political conception. The normative strand grew out of traditional sociology. Through the normative lens, institutions are seen as systems of social obligation abiding by rules of appropriateness. The focus of the normative conception, for example, is on such issues as appropriate teacher certification requirements and acceptable teacher behavior. The third grouping is the more recent cultural-cognitive conception, emphasizing a social constructionist approach and embracing a practical theory of action in which a *taken-for-grantedness* forms the basis for compliance (Scott, 2001). Combining cultural and

cognitive understandings, this conception recognizes both individual mindsets and commonly held constructions (Scott, 2003). For example, a school activity that *reflects* and at the same time *constructs* school culture and individual perspectives is exemplified by the morning assembly that brings students and faculty together daily to recite pledges, hear important announcements, and sing the school song. This cultural-cognitive lens is particularly effective for urban schooling, often facilitating the displacement of racist and exclusionist practices in favor of diversity and inclusion (Foley, 1990; Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 2002).

This typology—regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive—includes inherent overlaps but presents a way of clarifying different aspects of institutional reality (Scott, 2001). Analysts may more easily comprehend the multidimensional nature of an organizational context by attending carefully to the complexities of these three conceptions, which are referred to as *pillars* by Scott. The typology, depicted in the table below, is useful because it illuminates and clarifies different aspects of institutional reality.

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Three Conceptions of Institutions

Table 1

	Regulative	**Normative**	**Cultural Cognitive**
Basis of Compliance	Expedience	Social obligation	Taken-for-grantedness Shared understanding
Basis of Order	Regulative rules	Binding expectations	Constitutive schema
Mechanism	Coercive	Normative	Mimetic
Logic	Instrumentality	Appropriateness	Orthodoxy
Indicators	Rules Laws Sanctions	Certification Accreditation	Common beliefs Shared logics of action
Basis of Legitimacy	Legally sanctioned	Morally governed	Comprehensible Recognizable Culturally supported

(Scott, 2001, p. 52)

Like most institutions, schools are not simple replicas of one another, despite their many similarities. Scott writes:

> Although organization analysts early embraced an open systems conception of organizations, it has taken a long time for us to begin to comprehend the extent to which *organizations are creatures of their distinctive times and places* [italics added], reflecting not only the technical knowledge but also the cultural rules and social beliefs in their environments (2001, p. 178).

The New Institutionalism emphasizes the cultural-cognitive conception. This conception provides a deep foundation for rule-bound and normative behaviors of institutions. The cultural-cognitive conception provides classificatory systems, premises, and assumptions that, in turn, provide the foundation on which norms and rules rest (Scott, forthcoming, pp. 11-12). While all three conceptions, or pillars, are manifested in institutions to

varying degrees, the cultural-cognitive conception, which helps us see more clearly the various perspectives inherent in a diverse community, is particularly useful for analyzing the urban school environment. If students' educational, cultural, and emotional needs are not met by the school as an institution, and if the population is not given a legitimized place in the school community, the changing cultural makeup in the student body can create instability in the school system. This destabilization is reflective of the current crisis in performance in many urban schools. How the three conceptions relate to one another, and how to allow for mythologized or *taken-for-granted* isomorphic assumptions, structures, systems, and processes that vary by cultural groupings, are two key issues in schools today.

AGENCY AND STRUCTURE

Although, the early formulations of the New Institutionalism tended to favor a top-down, macro approach to understanding institutions (DiMaggio, 1983; Meyer, 1977; Powell, 1988), there is a renewed push to consider the micro-level in recent years. This renewed interest in the micro-level seeks understanding of individual agency, from cognition to understanding to action. "Structure alone cannot explain the living, changing role that institutions play, since it is human agency that must actualize/act out that structure" (Zucker & Darby, 2005, p. 549). Micro-politics—politics at the site level—has developed into a sub-discipline of the politics of education over recent decades. The micro-level both shapes and is shaped by levels above it. It is critical to understand the

connection among the micro- and macro-levels in order to understand the politics of educational organizations. Close attention to the micro-level clarifies how cultural-cognitive aspects of a school can drive change.

The use of the concept of the *field* (Bourdieu, 1971; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1972) invites a full view of the multidimensionality and the scope of complexity in education environments (Meyer, Scott, & Strang, 1987; Powell, 1988; Rowan, 1982). The social context and complexity of any given locale derive from the wider institutional orders of economy, religion, family, and state (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Newly refreshed concepts of agency and interest arise. Echoing Zucker (1977), DiMaggio explained that researchers could uncover the *political* nature of change provided they consider existing institutions as well as the processes of both institutionalization and de-institutionalization. He wrote that any "theory that denies the reality of purposive, interest-driven, and conflictual behavior is limited in the range of problems to which it is applicable" (DiMaggio, 1988, p. 5).

Further, DiMaggio (1988) asserted that the institutionalization of one thing normally produces the de-institutionalization of another, thus arguing for an inherent logic of contradiction in which "institutionalization is a product of the political efforts of actors to accomplish their ends" (p. 13). For example, the ongoing development of standardized instructional approaches and the focus on direct, explicit instruction in the face of students' varying levels of language abilities and acquisition is a logical contradiction in schooling with clearly significant political ramifications. The current accountability system requires that English language learners undergo assessment in

English, even though the tests are supposed to measure conceptual understanding and academic skill levels, not their ability to speak and write in academic English. Thus the interests of parents and local community members to prevent unfair assessments of their children by instruments not adjusted to diverse student needs are on a collision course with the advocates of high-stakes testing. Such issues play out at state, district, and site levels with varying degrees of success. The level of success depends, in large part, on the legitimization afforded community voices that are all too often a muted part of the civic polity.

An individual's ability to act, to make a difference, must not be lost sight of, especially in a period of intense accountability. According to Scott (2001), educational leaders are not mere puppets dangling from the strings of external pressures. In fact, "individuals and organizations innovate, act strategically, and contribute to institutional change" (p. 75). Giddens (1979) argued that agency and structure are equally important. Institutions enable at the same time they constrain, just as individuals operate *within* at the same time they operate *outside* constraints. How do actors, embodying and populating a variety of organizations and institutions, matter in the decision-making processes of educators? An understanding of the role of individual agency interacting with macro-organizational pressures is a concern of researchers using institutional analysis. For example, how do individual principals manage to create positive school climate and culture in spite of new, external pressures from accountability demands? What beliefs, assumptions, and expectations are at work in schools where excellence prevails? Is it

possible for these approaches to be adopted or transferred to other schools? If so, how would such a transfer take place?

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Schooling is a societal field. The professionals who work in public schools, including charter schools, all have an idea of what *real* school is about (Tyack, 1974). This institutional understanding tends to constrain innovation in education. The normative and cognitive understanding of what is meant by best practices has been traditionally defined by the practitioner. What is the teacher's social obligation to the students and to the profession? What is supported by the indicators of certification and accreditation? Using the federal government's nomenclature, best practices are those that produce the desired results—i.e. what works. However, this concept of what works at the local level may lose its salience as the federal government attempts to define it for the schools. The institutional requirements for scientifically based research and evidence based practice may well impact what the teachers and university professors are encouraged, even allowed, to create. These regulative forces are backed by the power of the government, from the federal level through the state and local levels. Will public school teachers and researchers continue to decouple their technology of teaching from the organization of the school? Will the school's legitimacy continue to issue from myth, ceremony, and symbolic actions?

Clearly there is a significant amount of taken-for-grantedness and shared understanding still evident in public schools. There are common beliefs and shared logics of action that are culturally supported. But how long will this situation last? Will the institutional pressures of the federal and state governments and the business community manage to redefine best practices? Or might the critical professional judgment of the teachers in the classroom assert itself in collaboration with research developed within the university and the state and federal governments? These are some of the questions that are being addressed by New Institutional theorists. These theorists are beginning to illuminate the interactive nature of the relationship between individual agency, the organization, and related institutional forces.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This literature review considers several issues related to the condition, situation, and direction of the implementation of best practices at the University Elementary School. The researcher evaluates the literature on the nature of education in a knowledge-based society, the concept of practice, professionalization of teacher practice, the current accountability movement and its impact on the definition of best practices, scientifically based research in education, school-university partnerships and their role in teacher and administrator professional development, charter schools and their role in the diffusion of innovation, laboratory schools, the issue of autonomy, and the issue of choice.

There is little literature that combines these areas of research, but there is considerable literature on the component parts. Further, there is a relatively small amount of empirical research on the topic of institutional pressures and supports in schooling.

EDUCATION IN A KNOWLEDGE-BASED SOCIETY

We live in a knowledge-based society. Life-long learning is essential to the health and welfare of all individuals, groups, organizations, and communities. Teachers and students alike must consider their capacities not as storehouses of information but rather in terms of skills for critical thinking, adaptability, and creativity in the face of on-going change (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Learning and cognition are no longer

considered to be an impenetrable black box. Moreover, cognition is not an individual matter. Many cognitive scientists believe that much cognition is socially situated and distributed (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Moll, 1991; Resnick, 1991).

We have discovered a great deal about cognition and learning that allows and encourages educators to create learning opportunities that require greater experimentation and engagement of students (Kerchner, Koppich, & Weeres, 1997). These researchers call for teaching settings to be "more situationally responsive, the curriculum and teaching process more fluid" than has been true in the past (p. 56). Knowledge is no longer viewed as static but is essentially the product of learning and meta-learning, or learning about learning, through reflection, and it often takes place in a community of practice. Learning is inescapably a social creation (Ranson & Stewart, 1998). As teachers and administrators work to meet the complex, challenging needs of our society, they need to understand the nature of knowledge, learning, and teaching, as well as how these elements relate to both their practice and their students' learning.

CONCEPT OF PRACTICE

Teachers learn about practice *through practice* (Cohen & Ball, 1999), which is to be distinguished from the generalized learning from experience. Day-to-day practice is inherently local (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Teaching requires an understanding of the situated nature of knowledge and the need for a teacher to evaluate and respond to specific situations and students in the classroom (Lampert & Ball, 1998). Teachers must work to comprehend the deep cultural foundations of classroom behavior. The social and

cultural context of students must be incorporated into the teacher's practice in an appreciation of how to guide student learning (Ladson-Billings, 1997). This learning may fruitfully include self-appraisal by teachers who are most often white and female while their student populations are increasingly diverse and, of course, of both genders. Teachers must develop knowledge of their practice to understand if and when it is producing student learning. However, they must also develop knowledge for practice so that they might have a greater chance of practicing in ways that have been vetted by other practitioners (referred to as best practice or exemplary practice).

This distinction between knowledge of practice and for practice helps us see the importance of reflection and new learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Teachers evaluate and consider student work and thus create knowledge *of* their own practice. As teachers draw from one another and outside resources such as universities, education support centers, and other expert-based organizations, they practice knowledge *for* practice in general. They consider new ways of understanding and take time to reflect on these new practices.

Good teachers are able to carry out a task while defining or redefining it (Mitchell, Ortiz, & Mitchell, 1987). This concept is reminiscent of Schön's (1983) idea of *reflection-in-action* which allows the practitioner to enter into a "continuing practice of self-education" (p. 299). Teachers produce what Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (1999) have called a *collective mindfulness*, which involves a continual interpretation and on-going evaluation of what works. Like Polanyi's (1983) *tacit knowledge*, or Bourdieu's (1990) *habitus*, much of what happens in a classroom may be described as a reenactment

of cultural patterns (Bowers & Flinders, 1990). Many domains of learning draw from understandings that can be realized through apprenticeship and practice. Learning how to teach effectively is one of these domains. If we are to reform practice, it is imperative that we understand practice.

The implementation of education policy has many unintended consequences, however. Researchers are beginning to find that complex policy, or policy coming from multiple directions, may be interpreted in a variety of ways. Spillane and his colleagues (Spillane & Callahan, 2000; Spillane & Jennings, 1997; Spillane & Zeuli, 1999) have recently used cognitive learning theory to explain that teachers view new forms of instruction through the filters of preexisting beliefs, knowledge, and experience. Instead of thinking deeply about the reformed instructional approaches dictated by policymakers, teachers quite frequently mistake a superficial understanding for a more profound understanding. They may add only a few aspects or features to their current approach, thinking they are actually implementing the policy. One partial solution to this problem is for the teachers to be part of a community of practice—a learning community—that shares perspectives and differing points of view. In this manner, teachers become learners so that their students benefit from greater fidelity in policy implementation.

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF TEACHER PRACTICE

The professionalization of teachers' work is central to efforts focused on school improvement in a context of highly complex social change and increasingly challenging circumstances. The teacher is more than an individual worker and should be understood

in the context of communities of learners and communities of practice. If the teacher, *as professional,* is to make effective, multiple judgments required by conditions of teaching with diverse populations of students, then the teacher needs support from the school community environment. A true professionalism implies a shared commitment to improving teaching practice (Louis, Kruse, & Associates, 1995), which in turn requires a professional community. However, professional communities assume key attributes of inquiry, continual learning, teamwork, and mutual support that are frequently absent in today's standardized, bureaucratic system. An often cited example is the lack of teaching professionalism involved in drilling students for the purpose of increased test scores (McNeil, 2000; Sacks, 1999). Hargreaves writes about *grown-up norms* of professional communities and how they must include broadly shared goals related to teacher learning, student learning, caring, and respect for all (Hargreaves, 2003). Clearly, professional learning communities cannot survive in standardized systems that devalue teachers' decision-making abilities.

Schools as Learning Organizations and the Nature of Learning

Traditional Model of School

The present-day view of the learning process developed out of the factory model of education at the turn of the 20th century (Cuban, 1986). It worked well in preparing large numbers of individuals for low-paying jobs in industry and agriculture. Classrooms were standardized at 20 to 30 students, and instruction was standardized with the help of textbooks and teacher training. This teacher centered approach is basically a broadcast

model of teaching where the teacher transmits knowledge to the students. Windschitl explains:

> Congruent with this perspective are the transmission models of instruction, in which lecture and demonstration are the preferred modes of 'delivering' such knowledge to learners. Teachers instruct the entire class and present 'right answers' as well as the 'right ways' to solve problems; students' existing knowledge has little relevance in such environments" (Windschitl, p. 142).

This model of instruction can take the joy out of learning and frequently considers a lack of learning to be the fault of the student.

A New View of Learning

By comparison, a new view of learning is emerging that is based on three decades of research in human cognition and learning theory (Brown & Campione, 1990; Brown, Campione, Webber, & McGilly, 1992; Gardner, 1983; Gardner, 1999). This approach considers learning to be a natural process even though not everyone learns in the same fashion. Learning is also regarded as a social process. As Vygotsky (1978) noted many years ago, students learn best when they are learning together, with peers, teachers, parents, and others. Learning is an active process. Learners need to learn how to produce knowledge, not simply reproduce it. Learning may be linear or non-linear depending on many variables, including the subject of study and on the individual learner. Learning is integrated and contextual. The learner may be given information and support, but the students must make the connections themselves. Learning works best when based on the student's strengths and interest. Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences has helped educators understand diversity of learning styles as a resource rather than a deficit. Finally, learning is considered in this new model based on cognition to be most

appropriately assessed through task completion, products, and real problem solving of individual and group efforts. Standardized state tests tell us relatively little about the individual learner's accomplishments.

Teaching for the Knowledge Society

Hargreaves (2003) believes that:

> Teaching for the knowledge society… involves cultivating these capacities in young people—developing deep cognitive learning, creativity, and ingenuity among students; drawing on research, working in networks and teams, and pursuing continuous professional learning as teachers; and promoting problem-solving, risk-taking, trust in the collaborative process, ability to cope with change and commitment to continuous improvement as organizations (p. 3).

Labaree (2004) concurs: "Teachers need a broad understanding of the whole student—emotional life, family situation, social condition, cultural capital, cognitive capacities" (p. 47). This situation increases the complexity of teaching tremendously and is compounded by a lack of accepted practice. Labaree (2004) wrote, "A troubling fact about teaching is that there is not an established set of professional practices that have been proven to work independent of the particular actors involved and the particular time and place of the action" (p. 53).

While this lack of a body of knowledge makes the job more difficult, it does not make it impossible. To be accomplished successfully, however, teaching needs to be understood as part art and part science. It is always an emotional practice with challenging and rewarding relationships at its foundation. Excellent teaching is focused on the purposes and the work of teaching. A knowledge society, or learning society, demands "the power to think, learn, and innovate" (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 18-19). Because

teaching involves relationships and purpose, it has a moral foundation that is concerned with character, community, democracy and identity (Hargreaves, 2003). To attempt to avoid the relationship side of teaching is to reduce both excellence and equity in student learning.

Organizational Learning

Sometimes there are obstacles to organizational learning. People work very hard to reproduce organizational systems they know best because society prefers predictability (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Scott & Meyer, 1991). That predictability is found in "rules and requirements to which individual organizations must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy" (Scott & Meyer, 1991, p. 123) and broad institutional scripts that influence actions (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995).

March (1991) writes about learning as a need to balance *exploration* with *exploitation*. Exploration includes search, variation, risk taking, experimentation, play, flexibility, discovery, and innovation. Exploitation includes refinement, choice, production, efficiency, selection, implementation, and execution. He writes further:

> Adaptive systems that engage in exploration to the exclusion of exploitation are likely to find that they suffer the costs of experimentation without gaining many of its benefits. They exhibit too many undeveloped new ideas and too little distinctive competence. Conversely, systems that engage in exploitation to the exclusion of exploration are likely to find themselves trapped in suboptimal stable equilibria. As a result, maintaining a balance between exploration and exploitation is a primary factor in system survival and prosperity (March, 1991, p. 71).

This concept is reminiscent of Argyris's (1976) *single-loop* and *double-loop* learning where single-loop is learning without questioning the fundamental purposes, design, or goals of the organization while double-loop learning would allow such questioning.

BEST PRACTICES IN AN AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Most of the literature on instructional best practices focuses on teacher attributes, beliefs, and capacities. Recently, however, scholars have explored the organizational and institutional settings as influencers of significance and meaning for the practitioner. Sarason (1996) writes that the practitioner has a "broad conceptual and institutional framework within which his or her activities take on meaning and justify actions" (p. 47). Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, and Manning (2001) note that "Encountering and internalizing educational ideas and practices does not occur in a vacuum . . . how the workplace of teaching is organized significantly affects how well the intellectual and emotional work of teaching and of change is done" (p. 157). Erickson (1986) asserts, "What the teachers do at the classroom and building level is influenced by what happens in the wider spheres of social organization and cultural patterning" (p. 122). Indeed, the epistemological basis for developing constructivist learning environments is very different from the basis of support for the direct, explicit model of instruction. The "default epistemology of Western schooling is objectivism, which in many ways is the antithesis of constructivism" (Windschitl, p. 142). There is greater societal support and legitimacy offered to educators who focus on the direct, explicit instruction and improvement of standardized test scores.

As the accountability movement has tightened up procedures, additional pressure and the concomitant effects on teaching practice have become apparent. Teacher interpretations of the role that accountability plays in their school or district affects their pedagogical practice. In reaction to these pressures, teachers may change their practices

in many ways. However, according to Fullan (1991), this kind of change comes only as a result of new learning. The teachers must have the opportunity to share power and authority if they are to have an environment conducive to their own learning of new practice (Smylie, 1995). However, an individual teacher's response to this need to learn a new practice may vary considerably from her colleague's response. The pressure to streamline, manage, and standardize best practices could in fact have the opposite effect, depending on the definition or perceived meaning of best practices (Darling-Hammond, 1997). If an instructional leader needs to adjust her teaching to the specific learning needs of the learner, then a scripted guide may not be in the best interest of the child. The best practice, in any given circumstance, would have to consider differing learning styles and specific learning objectives. This approach, however, is counter to today's pressures to standardize curriculum and instruction.

Research suggests that teachers should learn to appreciate the need for new practice and must be willing to change their own thinking and teaching if the implementation of best practices is to succeed (Cohen, 1990; Cuban, 1993; Sarason, 1996). Often there will be a partial acceptance of the new practice, with the teachers accommodating their perceived needs of the children before the strict adoption of the practice. Thus teachers become partially decoupled from the reform effort (Cohen & Barnes, 1993; Meyer & Rowan, 1991). Policies that fail to recognize the critical role of the teacher and her need for flexibility may produce serious, negative unintended consequences.

New Institutionalism suggests that school organization echoes the institutionalized rules of the organizations in their environments (Meyer, Scott, & Deal, 1992). School structures reflect society's beliefs and values regarding rational organization and appropriate design of the various facets of schooling. At the same time, teachers may adopt practices merely to maintain the appearance of legitimacy. "This apparently irrational behavior can be explained by the institutional pressures the teachers felt in the context of their teaching" (Darling-Hammond, 1997). The manner in which teachers "transform their world and their work" (Lieberman & Miller, 1999) shows itself in the way they respond to external pressures. Teachers have had considerable discretion in the way they function in their workplace, although that appears to be changing.

SCIENTIFICALLY BASED RESEARCH (SBR) IN EDUCATION

Increasingly, there has been an emphasis on evidence-based practice in education. The most recent example is the scientifically based research (SBR) requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which defines scientifically based research as "research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs" (NCLB, Section 9101(37)(A)). School leaders who rely on federal funding must consider whether their research meets these SBR requirements (Beghetto, 2003a). Incorporating several research sources, the Clearinghouse on Educational Policy and Management developed this definition of SBR: "Persuasive research that empirically examines important

questions using appropriate methods that ensure reproducible and applicable findings" (Beghetto, 2003b).

With the advent of efforts to anchor educational research and practice in scientifically based research, best practice is increasingly defined as *evidence-based practice*. The National Research Council (NRC) states that:

> The field of education research as a distinct area of scholarly inquiry has evolved over roughly 100 years. It comprises a group of investigators from different disciplines, fields, and institutions who bring a range of theories, objectives, and orientations to their work….More akin in some ways to professional fields like social work or public policy, education research takes cues from the practice of teaching, the process of learning, and the organizational structures and routines of the many institutions with education-related missions (2005, p. 9).

However, a bridge from policy to practice is at times too far. For example, there is a significant consensus about the importance of early reading instruction coupled with a solid research base on what is required for children to achieve their goals in reading, and yet:

> Many children in U.S. schools are not learning to read well and, in many classrooms, *teaching practices have not been influenced by research knowledge* [italics added]. In the panel's view there is a gap between the knowledge base on the contributors to success in early reading and the knowledge base on effective instruction and teacher knowledge requirements (Donovan & Pellegrino, 2003, pp. 2-3).

Some educators are embracing this scientific approach while others are "expressing concern about what they view as an inappropriate encroachment on their profession" (National Research Council, 2005, p. 11). These educators argue that the teacher in the classroom must attend to the context of the actual class and group of students and be flexible in his or her instructional strategy. Many practitioners want to retain the option of selecting the appropriate instructional strategies for the particular

students, rather than have it precluded by tightly controlled scripting or administrative management. The scientifically based researchers respond that the conditions and context must be taken into account at the research stage so that the implementation with fidelity is more clearly assured (National Research Council, 2005). Researchers emphasize the importance of teachers in the transformation of SBR into practice. Hargreaves notes, "We should do Development and Research rather than Research and Development—this puts the innovation into the hands of the practitioners, and then research is done on their work. In R&D, the practitioners put the research into practices" (International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement, 2003). According to Hargreaves, schools should be *knowledge-creating* organizations (1999).

As the debate continues, the Department of Education's Strategic Plan for 2002–2007 clearly called` for the transformation of education into an evidence-based field by strengthening the quality and use of educational research (United States Department of Education, 2002). To quote from a conference sponsored by the federal government in 2002, "Education is a field where there are many good intentions and many innovative ideas, but where ideas and interventions often go in and out of practice with little regard to rigorous evidence" (Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy, 2002, p. 18).

This effort was not the federal government's first foray into the issue. From the Cooperative Research Act of 1954 to the creation of the National Institute of Education in the early 1970s, and now to the recent incarnation of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), which established the What Works Clearinghouse, the federal government has been keen on using its

expertise to facilitate SBR and evidence-based practice (Beghetto, 2003a). The U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences established the What Works Clearinghouse in 2002 "to provide educators, policymakers, researchers, and the public with a central and trusted source of scientific evidence of what works in education" (Institute of Education Sciences, 2005). The purpose of the What Works Clearinghouse is to help educators locate and evaluate programs and evidence-based practice in order to make better educational decisions.

Granted, pedagogical practice is a variable and somewhat uncertain activity. Children come from many backgrounds and with diverse interests and talents. However, teaching and learning become less problematic when they are soundly based in evidence that is well understood by all key stakeholders (Huberman, 1999).

SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

There is a call for universities and public schools to become more collaborative in their efforts to prepare teachers as professionals (Goodlad, 1984; Lieberman, 1992). Traditionally, the university served as the producer of teachers and the schools were the recipients. Interaction between the two was rare. However, there is an increasing need for better prepared teachers and for improvement in the teacher-preparation programs. New arrangements are being developed that leverage the expertise of both school professionals and university professionals. School professionals can mentor student teachers, act as experienced consultants in the research on contemporary and new teaching practices, and serve as clinical faculty in the teacher preparation program. Universities employ clinical

faculty and engage doctoral students in their school-university partnership programs and studies. They might provide the core curriculum and field supervision for the teacher preparation program and lead the research teams. Related to this situation are opportunities for action research and a redefinition of scholarship (Boyer, 1990; Lieberman, 1992).

Calls for school-university partnerships began as part of the education reforms of the 1980s. This effort to combine the expertise of the practitioner and scholar has made it possible for schools and universities to serve populations that are economically, culturally, and linguistically diverse. This kind of partnership encourages university faculty members to update their knowledge of the classroom and to extend narrow specializations to more practical purposes (Boyer, 1990). Similarly, the public schools need to develop the kind of expertise that is often resident in the university—collaboration among teachers, time for reflection on practice, and understanding the theoretical underpinnings of research on education issues such as cognition, cultural differences, and teaching practices (Lieberman, 1992). Many researchers point to exemplary innovations in learning practice that have developed as a result of teachers acting alone or in cooperation with university-based scholars (Kerchner et al., 1997). Teacher knowledge and input are critical to the development of new learning strategies.

However, there are long-held tensions between public school and university professionals. School-university partnerships bring together two contrasting cultures (Robinson & Darling-Hammond, 1994). Public school teachers and administrators tend to want to solve problems, whereas university faculty are inclined to focus on trying to

understand problems (Labaree, 2003). Each group has a history of distrust of the other, and attempts to work together have not always been satisfactory (Barth, 1990). Barth's description is apt. Schools and universities are "two peculiar cultures, and where they meet is even more peculiar—a rather messy and often quite lively place" (1990, p. 103). He continues:

> In their careers, few elementary and secondary educators have escaped being demeaned by the universities. Expectations have been held out and violated at the preservice and inservice levels and in courses, workshops, consultations, and evaluations. . . . Schools are unforgiving, inhospitable places for academics. . . . The implication is clear: Before launching any new crusade, we must deal with the wounds of previous crusades. How, then, to start afresh when burdened with so much bad baggage? (pp. 103-104).

One of the ways that this tension can be overcome is through long-term, concerted efforts at integrating theory with practice, specifically through the transformation of traditional research into action research (Lieberman, 1992). Networking on issues of common interest produces significant, intangible rewards for the participants. However, this is not an easy matter.

> Factoring in research further complicates the technological problem for colleges of education. . . . For colleges of education must not only produce knowledge for their academic peers, but produce, disseminate, and transfer usable knowledge to the education profession. And these are two very different tasks (Rhoades, 1990, pp. 190, 197-198).

While there is a growing consensus that educational research must be connected to practice, action research has been minimal because it is misunderstood (Wong, 1995). Surprisingly, action research is often resisted by the ivory tower, even though it is considered to be a valid method of real-world professional development and school reform (Anderson & Herr, 1999). Further, practitioners tend not to seek out university-

sponsored research to improve their practice (Grimmett & Mackinnon, 1992). Making university-based research useful continues to be difficult. In order to improve the university-school relationship, it is necessary to overcome the difficulties that characterize the divide between K-12 and higher education, including the low status of teacher education in the university and the divergence in values placed on teaching versus research. There is a concern that the teacher's voice is missing from the research literature (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990).

CHARTER SCHOOLS: INNOVATION AND DIFFUSION OF BEST PRACTICES

In considering the nature of innovation and diffusion in charter schools, it is valuable to look at the history of the charter school movement. In 1988, Ray Budde created a model for improving instruction and changing school organization based on a charter between teachers and a school that would establish instructional programs. It would give teachers the opportunity to explore and develop new approaches to educating children. The instructional models would serve as models for neighboring districts. The teachers were considered worthy of trust and were thought to be able to exercise professional judgment (Budde, 1988).

Charter schools were not the first models aimed at helping schools break away from the bureaucracy that was stifling public education. There were also (1) innovation schools that were created with teacher, parent, and community input, (2) magnet schools created to help integrate school districts and provide specialized curricular themes and

instructional methods, and (3) alternative schools, designed by districts to serve students outside of their attendance areas or to serve students who do not fit into traditional school environments (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). Home schools have emerged as an additional alternative.

Research has shown, however, that transfer of best practices from charter schools is minimal (Lubienski, 2002). Lubienski concluded that the charter school movement does not, in and of itself, provide the necessary changes in organizational structure to create highly transferable innovations. He writes that charter school status is neither sufficient nor necessary for the development of innovations in curriculum and instruction (2002).

Schools frequently alter innovative strategies or best practices to meet their own needs (Weiss, 1991). Localized or home-grown improvements have been found to be of value due to the localized knowledge of school structure, culture, staffing, and student characteristics (Louis, Rosenblum, & Molitor, 1981). Sarason (1996) has noted that outside change agents frequently have problems duplicating the innovative ideas drawn from another setting. However, successes are reported in cultures willing to accept change (Fullan, 1993). Moreover, developing a collaborative culture, or learning community, is desirable for effective adoption of innovation (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1999; Hargreaves, 1992). Knowledge transfer is very difficult without a familiar and trusting relationship between the source and the user (Fullan, 1985).

Fullan identified factors contributing to the complexities of knowledge transfer. Certain explicit or tacit skills found in one school culture may be absent in another

(Fullan, 2000). Successful reforms may be a function of good ideas, the conditions of the setting, or both. A culture that is open to change and one that fosters a creative environment stands a better chance of effecting change (Senge, 1990).

Several ideas emerge from the literature. It is essential for school professionals to have a feeling of ownership or an internalization of innovative ideas for the successful transfer of innovation to occur. This notion includes the perception of usefulness for the teacher and administrator (Fullan, 1991). Second, it is important to have high-quality information (Sarason, 1996) that is understood by all parties involved in the knowledge transfer. Third, it is valuable to have direct personal contact and guidance, providing feedback and the building of commitment on the part of individuals and groups (Klein & Gwaltney, 1991). Fourth, various policy issues can affect the transfer process (McLaughlin, 1991; Weiss, 1991). One might, for example, ask if the policy clearly supports the transfer of practice? And fifth, recent literature defines knowledge use as a learning process by both the originator and the user (Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleiner, 2000). The transfer must be regarded as an opportunity for learning.

Whether a school is a charter school or not, certain conditions must be met if the school is going to be successful in creating and adopting best practices in instructional and administrative strategy. A charter school may have the autonomy that makes it easier to encourage development of exemplary practice, but evidence shows that autonomy alone is not sufficient.

LABORATORY SCHOOLS

Laboratory schools are university-affiliated schools known variously as lab schools, demonstration schools, campus schools, model schools, or child development schools, and they each have a unique relationship to their sponsoring university. The subject of this dissertation is not technically a lab school because it does not claim to experiment with the children's education, but it has many characteristics of a lab school. For this reason, a couple of points on the general demise of lab schools are in order.

Laboratory schools, according to John Goodlad (undated), should have a school mission that is tied to the mission of the university of which it is a part. If, for instance, a lab school is part of a large research university, then, according to Goodlad, it should be available and accessible for research by the faculty. If the university is primarily a teaching school, then student teaching may be the focus. The trend has been to develop schools more as demonstration sites of good practice than as schools for teacher preparation (Goodlad, undated). This situation is similar to the mission of the Elementary School. Goodlad (undated) believes that lab schools "ought to be a place where the future teacher is able to see hands-on teaching at its best. Pedagogy, or the art and science of teaching, needs to be modeled for our teachers."

Laboratory schools offered many things to many people, from counseling to psychological support, sports, speech, debate, dramatics, music, and clubs. But throughout the years, universities began to question whether or not this expense was all worth the cost. Further, should the university be in the *business* of schooling? These are the kinds of questions that caused many lab schools to be closed over the past few

decades. There are similar questions asked of the University Elementary School. Fifty years ago there were about 200 lab schools. Today, depending on the definition, fewer than 100 remain (National Association of Laboratory Schools, 2006).

According to Arthur King (1984), laboratory schools have several advantages over other agencies when it comes to educational change. First, they provide a bridge between the university and the public schools. This partnership offers great opportunities to professors to maintain a reality base and to blend theory and practice. Second, these schools are a great source of ideas and innovation. Direct experience with students, teachers, parents, and others is very helpful in trying to understand why some things work and others do not work. Third, the schools provide a good basis for educational demonstration, modeling, and training. The parents and teachers know that the school is a site of research, so it is not a problem when the researchers are doing their work. Fourth, the school may design research or accept research according to what works in their research program. This way they may select research that is especially helpful to the school and students. A lab school is a natural link between practitioners and researchers. Finally, the lab school may be a natural point of contact regarding public school education for many departments in the university.

In recent years, laboratory schools have tended toward the research end of the continuum. Student teaching seems to be phasing out, but there are sharp increases in the laboratory school role in research and experimentation (King, 1984).

ISSUE OF AUTONOMY

Over the past 25 years the majority of school districts and states have experimented with some form of site-based management in order to enable democratic localism in the public schools and to improve efficiency and effectiveness of resource management at the local level. Texas currently mandates site-based management in every school. Site-based management has been defined in various ways. However, in its purest form, site-based management devolves management to the local level so that community members and school professionals are directly involved in running the school. The results have been mixed.

The critical challenge facing site-based management is an underlying institutional structure that is bureaucratic, centralized, and hierarchical, directly contradicting the goals and purposes of site-based management. This problem is compounded by the accountability movement, which is focused on efficiency and timely decision-making, often at the expense of equity and deliberation.

There seem to be two basic forces at play in the implementation of site-based management. While some schools are drawn to the democratic potential of the program, others seem compelled to follow the dictates of a managerial discourse. At times the site-based management effort has been used to defuse "unpleasantness because it provides opportunities for teachers to talk….It is hard to avoid the sense that in most [site-based management] schools,… teachers are being co-opted" (Weiss, 1993, p. 76). On the other hand, there are reports of schools where the participants are engaged and are initiating or implementing the policy. Clearly, the languages of the two approaches diverge, ways of

interacting are different, and settings and time for interaction vary. The state and the district have a bureaucratic, legalistic tone while the local school community is often face-to-face and sometimes deliberative. Even as the micro-politics take shape, the macro-politics can reach in and manage the discourse so that issues and parameters are pre-defined and limited. "Councils create opportunities to manage conflict, to get participants to 'endorse, *de facto*, the decisions they supposedly helped make,' and thereby surrender 'their right to complain later'" (Kanter, 1982, p. 15). Hence, the macro-politics and the micro-politics provide yet another place of contention, stress, and difference.

ISSUE OF CHOICE

School choice is a reform movement that supports the parental right to choose a school for their child's education. There are a number of choice options (Cookson, 1994), from intra-district choice, to controlled choice, to magnet schools, home schools, and charter schools, and finally, voucher plans that allow choice among various options depending on the plan. Advocates argue that giving parents a choice creates healthy competition among schools. The free market ideal gives the schools the incentive to improve. The parents and students are viewed as *consumers* of education. Competition leads to increased accountability, which, the supporters say, causes the schools to be more innovative in an attempt to improve performance (Raywid, 1992). According to this logic, the competition places under-performing schools out of business when they do not measure up.

Some supporters believe that school choice is an equity issue and that it can help disadvantaged populations. Garrett (2001) asserts that many of the poor are trapped in schools that don't work for them, and that we need to give the poorest parents some options. Two recent studies support this strategy (Greene, 2000; Witte, 1999).

Others argue that parental choice also increases parental involvement (Aguirre, 2000). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 states that parents with a child enrolled in a school identified as in need of improvement can transfer him or her to a better-performing public school or public charter school. However, opponents ask which families are actually in a position to make informed decisions about their children's education (Fuller, Elmore, & Orfield, 1996). Some researchers argue that choice may harm the public school system and leave behind those students whose parents do not have the knowledge or resources to find a school for their children (Cookson, 1992). Opponents are also concerned about the loss of funding when parents choose schools outside of the traditional school system (Lyons, 1995).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The institutional and organizational issues related to the nature of education in a knowledge-based society, the concept of practice, professionalization of teacher practice, the current accountability movement and its impact on the definition of best practices, scientifically based research in education, school-university partnerships and their role in teacher and administrator professional development, charter schools and their role in the

diffusion of innovation, laboratory schools, the issue of autonomy, and the issue of choice have all been considered above. While each of these topics is well-represented in the literature, there is very little empirical research or theoretical thinking that directly addresses the thesis that the institutional pressures and supports present in the creation and implementation of best practices at a university-sponsored charter school have significant impact on the success of the school in fulfilling its mission as a demonstration site. There is a need for research that brings these areas of concern together. The current case study is an example of such research.

Institutional pressures are clearly at work in the transfer of best practices from one school to another. Because this transfer is heavily mediated by its environment, the institutional demands and requirements placed on the Elementary School must receive special consideration in the analysis. The literature supports the likelihood that the School's charter status, by itself, has little impact on its ability to provide a model of best practices, but it may be important to the extent that it leverages the autonomy required for experimentation.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the qualitative research design and methodology used in this research. The first section reviews the problem, research question, and purpose of the study. The following section characterizes the advantages and disadvantages of the case study method. The next section looks at the site selection, the selection of participants, and why they are appropriate subjects. Following that is a discussion of the various data collection instruments and methods. Finally, the analytical strategy is articulated with an overview of the theoretical framework and analysis.

REVIEW OF THE PROBLEM, RESEARCH QUESTION, AND PURPOSE

We are challenged as researchers and practitioners to provide education research and education practice which is closely aligned to theory and practice that *works*. The School that is the subject of this dissertation was designed to meet this challenge. The research is founded on the assumption that uncovering the institutional pressures and supports placed upon the School as an organization designed to serve as a model of best practices helps us understand how practice can be usefully informed by research. There are many issues and nuances in the complex condition of education, research, and practice that may be enlightened by this type of study.

The theoretical framework of the New Institutionalism (Scott, 2001) supplies the primary question that is asked: What are the regulative, normative, and cognitive pressures and supports that shape the organization and culture of schooling in the Elementary School, and what impact do they have on the School's ability to fulfill its mission? This question frames the study. The answer to the question may provide substance and direction for practitioners and universities looking to develop university-sponsored charter schools. Additionally, the process of using the framework may help researchers and academics understand the usefulness and requirements for examining institutional forces, both constraints and enablers, that impact such a school in its early years. It is important to understand how the process of instructional and administrative innovation developed to support disadvantaged populations and how it might be implemented in a complex institutional environment during times of high demand for accountability.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD: CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

C. Wright Mills is well known for his assertion that theory and method should not be considered separately but must stand in relation to one another and to the problems the researcher hopes to comprehend. The personal is not separate from the political. This notion seems especially true in education. Sociological imagination is helpful in relating individual problems to public issues (Mills, 1959). To understand the larger picture, the researcher must address the societal complexity of education. This understanding requires a comprehension of the links among many significant institutions: economic, political,

social, and cultural. It similarly demands a focus on understanding the relationship between the micro and the macro, the personal and the public, the individual and the collective. Pattern theories, such as that offered by Scott's New Institutional Theory, are well suited to qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) because they help to explain the interrelationships of the various elements that characterize the regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive aspects of institutions. In this way, case studies can help to build and extend theory.

This research is designed as a case study, which, according to Merriam (2001), is "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon or social unit" (p. 34). A compelling reason for doing a case study is to develop an in-depth understanding of the situation and its meaning for the stakeholders. "The qualitative case study is a particularly suitable methodology for dealing with critical problems of practices and extending the knowledge base of various aspects of education" (Merriam, 1988, p. xiii). Case studies are problem-centered and situation-specific. Additionally, they allow the researcher to look at a situation over time.

The unit of analysis is the University Elementary School. The School is located in the context of a large research university and a social environment that values and supports academic accountability and excellence. This inquiry focuses on the School's institutional context with a particular sensitivity to the pressures characterized by Scott (2001) as *institutional*: regulative, normative, and cognitive. As Yin (1994) pointed out, case studies are especially appropriate to situations where it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context. Several writers have put forth similar

definitions (Becker, 1968; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Wilson, 1979). This non-experimental, descriptive, and analytical approach is meant to uncover the institutional supports and constraints experienced by participants in the School's founding and on-going implementation, exposing the patterns and themes therein. Stake (1995) noted, "Insights into how things get to be the way they are can be expected to result from case studies" (p. 47). This type of study aims to uncover new relationships rather than confirm predetermined hypotheses.

Merriam (2001) suggests that there are four characteristics essential to a qualitative case study: particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive. Case studies focus on a particular phenomenon to provide a thorough description that illuminates the reader's understanding. Most case studies are inductive. This research begins with a theoretical framework but inductively examines the elements of the framework through interviews, observations, and documentation analyses. In this way, this case study is developed iteratively with a theoretical focus but at the same time remains open to the nuances and uniqueness of this particular case or phenomenon.

Marjorie Olson created a list of case study characteristics that help us understand the nature of this type of research. Olson suggested that a case study can:

- examine a particular instance but clarify a general problem.
- suggest what a reader might do in a similar situation.
- illustrate the complexities of the situation.
- show the influence of personalities and of passage of time.
- include in-depth and remarkably detailed description and information.

- use information from a great variety of resources.
- use an historical approach showing longitudinal information.
- include differences of opinion and discuss how they evolved.
- present many viewpoints.
- explain reasons for a problem, the background of a situation, what happened, why it happened.
- evaluate, summarize, and conclude, thereby increasing its usefulness as a study (as cited in Hoaglin, Light, McPeek, Mosteller, & Stoto, 1982, pp. 138-139).

Stake (1995) suggests that knowledge learned from a case study is particularly concrete, contextual, and open to interpretation by the reader. Patton (1985) writes that qualitative research helps us understand how the parts fit together to make the whole.

SELECTION OF THE SITE AND PARTICIPANTS

The University Elementary School was selected because of its uniqueness and its promise as a model for the solution to several of today's public school challenges that accrue from the disparity of opportunity for many minority children. It was conveniently located in the same city where this researcher's graduate department is located, thus shortening the lines of communication and observation, and also minimizing travel and expenses. The researcher was involved with the School from its opening in the fall of 2003. The first involvement was as a fellow doctoral student in class with the principal/chief executive officer of the School. In subsequent years, the researcher was employed by the University to engage in various research studies on the School. From

archival research to interviews of founders to clarifying and writing about the best practices implemented by the School, the researcher had been in and around the School's environment for nearly four years at the time of this study. The researcher's involvement was in the role of researcher for the School. Therefore, problems of role confusion so problematic in doing *backyard studies* (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) were not present. Nonetheless, there was the potential for a fair amount of bias that emerges from being in a situation of such hopeful, young students! These pre-Kindergarten through fourth grade students are as delightful as they are enthusiastic in their learning activities. Research in one's backyard may also lend itself to discoveries of politically uncomfortable or inconvenient knowledge (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Although this can present a problem, the researcher made an effort to be aware of these biases and issues.

The most important reason for selecting this school as a subject of research was that the School offers hope for the future of public schooling and for the promising relationships between universities and their local, disadvantaged school communities. (Please see Appendix A for a description of the School's demographics.) This research is meant to shed light on how other research universities might use their expertise and knowledge to help develop and implement best practices in their local schools.

The participants in the study were selected for their critical roles in the start-up and implementation of the School's mission. The founders, administrators, specialists, teachers, university faculty, and community members, including parents, were interviewed and observed in order to facilitate understanding the institutional forces at play in the creation and implementation of best practices at the School.

DATA COLLECTION: DOCUMENTS, OBSERVATIONS, AND INTERVIEWS

Data Collection

Data communicated through words are called *qualitative* data. Patton (1980) says that this type of data consist of "detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors; direct quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts; and excerpts or entire passages from documents, correspondence, records and case histories" (p. 22). Using multiple methods is called *triangulation*, which combines methods so that the flaws of one may be compensated for by another. Because the researcher has used a variety of data collection techniques, the data analysis benefited from triangulation.

The research questions focus on Scott's framework: regulative, normative, and cognitive elements. They are:

1. What are the regulative/structural elements of the School's institutional environment and what effect do they have on the School's mission and purpose?

2. What are the normative/value-driven elements of the School's institutional environment and what effect do they have on the School's mission and purpose?

3. What are the cognitive/cultural elements of the School's institutional environment and what effect do they have on the School's mission and purpose?

These questions were designed to be relatively open-ended in order to allow the unique situation of the School to emerge as they were answered. Prior to conducting the research, it was clear that several hypotheses could develop. Hypothetically, the regulative themes surrounding the School's beginning, such as the requirements to meet

the demands of No Child Left Behind Act, might be critical. Hypothetically, normative forces of how administrators feel the teachers should act could be the single most salient factor, undermining attempts to develop a unique school. Hypothetically, mind-sets regarding what a *real* school looks like could overshadow efforts to create something special in this school community. In this type of research, however, such hypothesizing can become reductive. Although it might be helpful to clarify possible outcomes of the research, to hypothesize *a priori* defeats the purpose of this type of qualitative research. Most case studies in education generate hypotheses rather than test hypotheses (Merriam, 2001).

Interviews

Interviews may produce highly valuable data for understanding a phenomenon under study. The success of the interview is established, in large part, by the successful interaction between the interviewer and respondent. The interview offers "continuous assessment and evaluation of information by the inquirer, allowing him [or her] to redirect, probe, and summarize" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 187). Interviews provide a good way to find out "what is on someone else's mind" (Patton, 1980, p. 196).

Interviews were conducted with a selected portion of the founders, school administrators, school specialists, university faculty, classroom teachers, parents, and community members of the Elementary School. Twenty six interviews were conducted in all. Nine teachers were interviewed in addition to two school administrators, one school specialist, four university faculty, two university administrators, one university research

center director, three University System administrators, one outside reading consultant, and two community leaders (one from the neighboring district), and one parent.

These interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes each. The interviews were semi-structured with questions pertaining to each of the three conceptions as defined by Scott (2001): regulative/structural, normative/value-driven, and cognitive/cultural. Follow-up interviews were performed as needed.

Observations

Participant observation provides a direct account of the situation being studied. When it is brought together with interviewing and document analysis, it enables the researcher to develop a full interpretation of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2001). Participant observation leverages the value of the researcher being able to rely on "one's ability to grasp motives, beliefs, concerns, interests, unconscious behaviors, customs and the like" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 193).

Formal and informal observations were conducted of governance meetings (Management Board, Parent Forum, and Education Council), the School's faculty meetings, and activities that engaged the entire community, such as morning assemblies, awards presentations, and special events.

Document Analysis

Documents, including (but not limited to) public records, brochures, artifacts, reports, and speeches, are normally produced independently of a research project. They are thus grounded in the context of the situation. Documents may be compared with one

another and used to validate or discount information from other documents or from other data collection methods. Documents can help the researcher reveal meaning, develop understanding, and uncover insights into the study problem (Merriam, 2001).

Several documents pertaining to the start-up of the School and the on-going implementation of best practices at the School were analyzed for content and interpretation. Some of the most salient were:

- The State Board of Education Application for the Charter, including all attachments such as: the media surrounding the start-up, letters from community leaders supporting the start-up; articles and letters voicing concerns about the charter school proposal; the proposed education plan; and the Strategic Business Plan.
- The University System "Every Child, Every Advantage" brochure.
- The Elementary School fundraising brochure.
- The Elementary School Faculty/Staff Handbook, including current education plans.
- The Elementary School Parent Handbook.
- The Elementary School Policy Manual (draft).

DATA ANALYSIS STRATEGY

Data collection and analysis in a qualitative study are simultaneous during the early stages. "The process of data collection is recursive and dynamic" (Merriam, 2001, p. 155). The researcher has analyzed the data through three stages: (1) during data collection; (2) during intensive analysis after data collection was complete; and (3) during development of theory. Each of these stages is reviewed in the following paragraphs.

Analysis During Data Collection

In the beginning, the researcher stated the problem, developed research questions, and defined the case. The analysis and data collection was amended by field notes and observer's comments in order to stimulate creative thinking about the case study. Ideas were tried out in subsequent interviews as a way to provide a reality check and to spur the analysis in directions that might prove fruitful. Perhaps most usefully, much of the literature review was completed during the initial data collection phase. This approach enhanced the data collection process and helped to maintain a focus while being open to new ideas.

The question arises about when to finish collecting data and when to start the intensive analysis of the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state four theoretical guidelines for ending data collection: exhaustion of resources, saturation of categories, emergence of regularities, and over-extension. The researcher found that the emergence of regularities was particularly defining in her decision to complete the investigation. Although wary of the danger of early, false conclusions, the researcher recognized the point at which the data collection was sufficient for thorough analysis. At this point, the patterns and themes were well developed and supported by the data.

The data was then organized by source and type and by thematic category using the three elements described by the New Institutional Theory: regulative, normative, and cognitive-cultural. The information was reviewed carefully so that redundancies could be eliminated, and then indexed into the three analytical areas. Finally, the researcher was poised to perform the intensive analysis that was designed to be at once thoroughly

descriptive but also to go beyond description to analytical interpretation. The final analysis is meant to shed light on the primary question of the institutional constraints and enablers faced by the School in the course of its attempt to implement its mission, and also to flesh out the New Institutional Theory for educational research purposes. The first part of the analysis, the interpretive analysis of findings, is dealt with in the findings chapter and in the final chapter. The second part of the analysis, the extension or enhancement of the theoretical framework, is considered in the final chapter.

Analysis in the Course of Intensive Scrutiny

The first step in analyzing the data intensively is to review the case data bank or record several times, each time noting remarkable events, ideas, or links among actors or situations. Goetz and LeCompte have written that at this stage the researcher is virtually holding a conversation with the data (1984), keeping a list of running ideas that provide the foundation for the ensuing synthesis and analysis. This synthesis began with the discovery of regularities and patterns that eventually became categories for subsequent sorting. This process took a great deal of time because each unit of information was processed and made ready for sorting. The units were coded in the margins of the interview transcripts, observations, and documents in order to save time. These coded items were then sorted according to category. The issues that emerged were largely orthogonal to the three conceptions of the New Institutional Theory. In other words, there was one-to-one correspondence between the issues and the theoretical elements. Of course, this situation did not happen *de novo* but evolved as a result of the issues present

in the political/social environment coupled with the selection of the theoretical framework. The specific topics highlighted for further analysis were integrated as a whole and also could be abstracted into convergent and divergent categories. Convergence relates to the items that come together to create a category. Divergence is the sorting out of categories from one another (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

The number and type of categories were determined according to four guidelines suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1981) as being important. The four guidelines were (1) the number of people who refer to a topic, or the frequency with which it is mentioned, (2) the audience one is attempting to reach with the research, (3) the uniqueness of the reference or item, and (4) categories that are themselves unique and potentially valuable to the knowledge base.

Holsti (1969) suggests some guiding principles applicable to the selection of categories. The categories should:

- Reflect the purpose of the research
- Be internally exhaustive: all relevant items should fit within the grouping
- Be mutually exclusive: items should fit into one category only
- Be independent so that assignment into one category will not affect the classification of other data
- Derive from a single classification principle.

The researcher used Holsti's first four guidelines in the development of the principle suggested by the fifth guideline. The research categories were developed according to their relationship to the purpose, their capacity to subsume all relevant items, their mutual

exclusivity, and their independence so that category assignment will not affect the other categories.

Analysis Throughout the Period of Theory Development

Beyond descriptive analysis, this research had as one of its goals the development or extension of the New Institutional Theory to add to the knowledge base of education research in an age of accountability. As Miles and Huberman (1984) write, this process is one moving up "from the empirical trenches to a more conceptual overview of the landscape" (p. 228). Here the researcher is not simply observing well but is connecting observable data with inferences. This inferential thinking is a move toward theorizing. If theorizing is defined as "the cognitive process of discovering or manipulating abstract categories and the relationships among those categories" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 167), then one sees how challenging a task this can be. The researcher moves back and forth between the phenomena being studied and the abstractions made about the phenomena. This process is contextual and non-linear because it involves a high level of complexity and interdependence among variables. Indeed, hypothesizing is a suggestion of links among the categories and properties. It is this continual moving back and forth between induction and deduction, between data and theoretical framework, that helps the researcher generate new connections and, potentially, new theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, issues of validity and reliability are of particular concern because the researcher cannot produce the apparent certainty of most quantitative studies. The issue of internal validity may be addressed through triangulation, member-checking, extended site visits, peer examination, and by exposing researcher biases and assumptions (Merriam, 2001). This researcher was on-site for nearly four years, attempted to clarify and expose biases, and addressed the data inconsistencies through triangulation and member checking. The concern for reliability—the extent that there is consistency among findings—is best managed by transparency of process in both data collection and data analysis. Finally, whether or not these findings can be generalized to another situation—external validity—is a difficult issue. The findings and analysis must be used with care and understanding of both the original case study and the subsequent situation or case. While the researcher must do what is possible to clarify the issues, the reader of the research is responsible for its use. Care must be taken to use the research in ways that are compatible and that retain fidelity with the original purpose and intent.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework used was discussed in the Literature Review: Scott's conceptual framework that highlights the regulative, normative, and cognitive themes in New Institutional Theory. Scott (2001) describes the regulative concept as one that relies on rules and control. The regulative concept highlights the governance aspects and structure of institutional life. The second theme is the normative concept that relates to

the values or the *ought to be* of the situation. It might be asked, for example, "How ought teachers to behave in the classroom?" And third, Scott describes the cognitive concept that portrays institutions as symbolic systems of meaning, showing institutions to be social constructions and perceptions of their members, rather than objective entities.

OVERVIEW OF THE ANALYSIS

The findings are described in Chapter 5. The first section considers issues regarding the regulative elements of the School's beginning and on-going operation. The political and legal environment at the federal, state, and local levels was particularly salient. The next section addresses the normative elements, with particular emphasis on what *real* school and *real* teachers are like and what they do in the act of teaching. The nature of parental involvement is also dealt with in this section. The third part of the findings relates to the cultural-cognitive foundation of schooling. This category has a strong bearing on the condition and direction of the other two elements. How things are interpreted, how issues are framed, and the assumptions people make, without realizing it, are all central to this grouping.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research was designed as a case study for the purpose of uncovering themes and patterns involved in the institutional environment of the new Elementary School. The study was developed for the dual purposes of helping institutions of learning create

schools to serve disadvantaged populations and to expose the usefulness of the New Institutional Theory for purposes of education research. The analysis was informed by Scott's theoretical framework that separates institutional forces into three categories: regulative, normative, and cognitive.

The data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The interviews used open-ended, semi-structured instruments designed to elicit various viewpoints and information not originally considered by the researcher as important. The observations were primarily of governance meetings, including those of the Management Board, Parent Forum, and Education Council. The documents were wide-ranging and included reports, minutes, newsletters, and quite significantly, a nearly 500-page application to the State Board of Education for the original charter. In the end, the researcher believes, enough data was accumulated and mined for a solid analysis.

The methodology was designed so that the case would provide a rich, contextual analysis that also would be valuable to practitioners and theoreticians alike. New Institutional Theory is *approaching maturity* according to its leading proponent (Scott, forthcoming). As part of that development, the researcher aims to show that it is not simply a theory of structuration and macro-level ideas. The theory has developed in ways that bridge the macro and micro as well as the institution and the actor (Giddens, 1984). The methodology used in this dissertation was selected because it allows and encourages ample contextual research and provides the ability to make connections among the many elements at multiple levels of analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS—INSTITUTIONAL PRESSURES AND SUPPORTS

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

This chapter describes the findings in terms of Scott's three conceptual groupings: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive institutional elements. An institutional setting or issue necessarily includes all three, but various topics naturally focus on one of the conceptions. Each of the three elements is discussed separately.

REGULATIVE/STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS

Introduction

The University Elementary School was conceived and created in a highly regulative environment. With the advent of NCLB, increasing state activism, and an eagerness to design, enforce, and control academic standards and accountability guidelines, the School was bound to be shaped, in large part, by what Scott (2001) calls the regulative pillar. Scott's regulative grouping describes laws, rules, monitoring, and sanctioning activities working together to ensure conformity and to direct future behavior. From the informal shunning in traditional villages to the highly formal police and courts in modern government, laws function as the embodiment of the dominant culture's preferences regarding behavior, activity, and even beliefs and attitudes. This conception uses a logic of instrumentality as its primary driver. In this conception, the

actor asks: Given this situation, what are my interests? The primary mechanism of control is that of coercion, although it should be noted that coercion is often accompanied by inducements and incentives, or at least a focus on the legitimacy of the regime or rules (Scott, 2001). Frequently the regulative structure involves the use of authority that essentially combines aspects of the regulative with the normative values embedded in the society. In any case, the laws and rules emerge from a cultural foundation that embodies the society's values and interprets or frames the rules and laws.

This part of the chapter relies heavily on document analysis and founders' interviews to describe the highly regulative environment that spawned the creation of the Elementary School. This section pays special attention to today's accountability movement, the reaction to NCLB by the University System and the Governor's Business Council, the Texas Reading Program, and the original vision of the Elementary School.

The Regulative Environment

This regulative environment evolved from many years of business interest and involvement in public school education. During the 1980's and early 1990's, businesses were streamlining their own activities, *re-engineering* their organizations to rid themselves of redundancy and unnecessary bureaucracy, and, subsequently, calling for similar efforts in the public sector. Privatizing parts of the public sector was considered to be valuable for the increased efficiency in the delivery of goods and services to the customer. This privatization was thought to lead to less bureaucracy, lower costs, better quality, greater choice, and less corruption. This interest evolved to include public

schools, directing them to become more efficient and outcomes-based with a concomitant request that schools produce a well-trained labor force. Workforce development efforts accelerated as the business community and government partnered in order to improve local, regional, and national economies. Public schools were an obvious object of concern as the private sector was forced to assume increasing amounts of remedial education and training of employees who had come to the place of business only partially ready for work. At the time the University System plan for P-16 alignment was developed, a former chancellor described the problem in this manner:

> Without a well-educated workforce, Texas will fail to be competitive in attracting industry with high-paying jobs for the new information age economy, as well as in maintaining the quality of life of the people in the state. The future economic prosperity and social cohesions of Texas depend on supplying the growing demand for well-educated 'knowledge workers.' Only higher education, working in close collaboration with the public school of Texas, can meet this demand (University of Texas System, 2002b).

Education is perceived to be a driver of economic growth. This is true for the nation as a whole as well as for Texas. In a report written by the Governor's Business Council, *From Good to Great: The Next Phase in Improving Texas Public Schools*, an account was given of the Texas education system reform:

> Two decades ago, the State of Texas began a set of groundbreaking reforms that made performance-based accountability the centerpiece of its public education system. Texas put in place the first state-wide public school accountability system: directly relating tests to standards; using schools as the unit of accountability; utilizing annual tests; disaggregating data by race and ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status; publishing widely the results of annual school report cards; and developing consequences for school performance. These reforms proved to be both innovative and effective and *served as a model for federal education reform through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002* (NCLB) [italics added] (Governor's Business Council, 2004, p. 3).

The Governor's Business Council consists of representatives from business who are chosen by standing members of the Council. This body is not an official part of the Texas governor's office (Embry, 2004). The Governor's Business Council (2004) called for helping the children who are stuck in low-performing schools, for helping prepare students for college, for improving the graduation rate among minorities, and for increased "disclosure and transparency in the expenditure of public funds" (p. 1). A member of the Governor's Business Council, who was also a driving force in the charter school's start-up, said in a public hearing that he was not pessimistic about education in Texas regardless of the apparent implications of the demographics. He continued, "If we can educate our people and get productivity improvement, along with technological investments, economic growth will happen" (Governor's Business Council, 2002, p. 44).

Accountability Movement

The business community's eagerness to use market forces to improve public school education developed into a focus on outcomes and results as opposed to inputs and resources. Schools had traditionally monitored inputs such as the number of computers in each classroom or the number of books in the school library but tended to ignore actual performance. In the 1980's the nation's governors proposed a kind of trade. If schools were given greater flexibility and local control, they would then have to produce measurable educational results. This environment spawned the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 at the federal level and the University System P-16 Initiative, Every Child, Every

Advantage (2002) at the state level. A member of the Governor's Business Council described the accountability movement in this fashion:

> We put a system in place that allowed us to change the paradigm … to go from inputs, which include teachers and quality and money, to the performance, the results. This change allowed us to take the central bureaucrats out of the mix and say 'You can't tell us what to do. We'll find a way to do what we want' (Governor's Business Council, 2002, p. 44).

Reinforcing this idea with regard to the University Elementary School, the education consultant selected by the University System to prepare the charter school application said that the creation of the charter school forced accountability on the University. "When you have a university-sponsored charter school, the university is for the first time responsible for results. They can no longer think theoretically and impractically. They have to do things that work for the kids" (Education Consultant, personal communication, September 29, 2004).

Key Actors

The story of the development of scientifically based reading research in the state of Texas, combined with the new NCLB, highlights the direct involvement of key actors in both the state's education reform activities and the ensuing federal involvement of key players closely related to President George W. Bush. The individual actors who provided the leadership for this school-university partnership were, for the most part, a fairly tight knit group of professionals strongly in favor of today's demands for public school accountability. The start-up of the School was tightly aligned with the state's education accountability system and with the federal requirements under NCLB.

One instrumental figure in the creation of the School was the Chairman of the Board of Regents of the University System who also served on the Governor's Business Council under then Governor George W. Bush. The Chairman did not hold a high opinion of the professional educators in the state. During a public hearing on the importance of aligning public schooling with higher education, he declared:

> I think implementing public school accountability was one of the most difficult tasks we ever faced…. I know that the biggest obstacles to public school accountability were the people in education.… The teachers as a group are people who knew the answers but wanted to have the freedom in the classroom…. The thing we did was to create a systemic reform…to essentially wire around the obstacles (Governor's Business Council, 2002, p. 44).

Moreover, the Chairman of the Board of Regents had been instrumental in selecting the Chancellor for the top University System post. The Chancellor came on board and backed the P-16 efforts strongly (University of Texas System, 2004). The Chancellor described himself and the Chairman as "being cut of the same cloth" (Treviño, 2006, p. 32). He and the Chairman concurred that higher education must play an important role in the entire alignment of the educational continuum from preschool through college.

Another key actor in the School's creation was a member of the Governor's Business Council and an attorney who was one of the principal architects of President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act, having worked as a special assistant to the President to facilitate the passage of NCLB. The attorney had a close relationship over a long time with the Chairman and early in 2002 became a paid consultant to the University System focused on the P-16 issues. He was asked to help develop a plan of implementation for the P-16 alignment. That plan, *Every Child, Every Advantage*, was presented to the Board

of Regents for approval by the Academic Affairs Committee in 2002. That was, according to the Vice-Chancellor, the official action "taken that led to the creation of the School. The Board played a very important role" (Vice-Chancellor, personal communication, February 9, 2006).

Texas Reading Program

As described in the introductory chapter, the Reading Program in Texas, funded from 1997, played a critical role in the start-up of the School. In addition, two University System institutions house two nationally recognized reading centers: the Center for Academic and Reading Skills at the UT Health Science Center at Houston and the Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts (TCRLA) at the University of Texas at Austin (now called the Vaughn Gross Center for Reading and Language Arts). The opportunity to create a school to demonstrate, among other things, the Texas Reading Program, promised to strengthen the state's reputation and help elementary schools in Texas succeed. The education consultant said, "A lot of the impetus for this School came from the [fact] that Sharon Vaughn, a national leader in reading instruction, is right there in Austin" (Jayson, 2002). Vaughn was called "Bush's favorite reading consultant" in *Texas Observer* (Peterson, 2002). An executive for the TEA concurred that reading instruction is central to school improvement. She said that the School "needs to be research based practice validated by student achievement gains. I think our yearly reading data, the pedagogy, and the good instructional practice, that's just the hallmark of the School" (Assistant Commissioner, personal communication, October 25, 2004).

University System P-16 Initiative, *Every Child, Every Advantage*

The University System P-16 Initiative, *Every Child, Every Advantage*, was conceived about the same time as the passage of the federal NCLB. As described above, the initiative called for a proposal to be submitted to the Texas Education Agency and the State Board of Education for approval of a charter school. This School, officially part of the University System's P-16 research agenda, would:

- Serve a diverse population of elementary students in Travis County.
- Establish a reading program for young children that is grounded in the scientific research conducted by TCRLA (now Vaughn Gross Center) and others and will serve as a model for the rest of the country.
- Adopt a math instructional program based on the groundbreaking, benchmarking study of the National Center for Educational Accountability based on the methodology of Just for the Kids to identify characteristics of math programs in high-performing schools serving disadvantaged students until scientifically based research on math instruction becomes available. (University of Texas System, 2002b).

Speaking at a Regents Meeting in May of 2002, the Chairman said:

> The initiative [*Every Child, Every Advantage Initiative*] tracks very closely a number of key provisions of the new federal education act [*No Child Left Behind*], and it promises to keep The University of Texas at the forefront of national education reform and advancement (University of Texas System Board of Regents, 2002, p. 70).

The State Board of Education Application

The charter application clearly specifies the plan for the School. A number of key ideas of the plan are highlighted online by the University System office. The website states that the educational philosophy would be grounded in effective schools research (University of Texas System, 2002a, p. 15), best practices research by the National

Center for Educational Accountability, and research for instruction in the core content areas. In addition to the core academic areas, special areas of instruction would include physical education, fine arts, cultural awareness, technology, and character education. "What will truly distinguish the charter school from many others is its consistent application of rigorous scientifically based research to inform all aspects of the School–curriculum, instruction, assessment, administration, and staffing" (University of Texas System, 2002a, pp. 15-16). Further, "*Explicit, teacher-directed instruction guided by student progress monitoring will form the backbone of the instructional approach*" [italics added] (University of Texas System, 2002a, p. 24). Innovative features of the School would include a longer school day and year, required after school programs for students who do not achieve benchmarks, a clinical setting for the training of pre-service teachers at UT Austin, development of a model family literacy program, continuous curriculum improvement through research-guided instructional practices, on-going professional development for teachers grounded in research-based instruction practices and a contract with the charter school families that spells out expected conduct and a dress code (University of Texas System, 2002a).

The *long-range vision* of the School was described as follows:

> To create a school where equity and excellence are a reality, where all students regardless of academic or economic background master the TEKS [state standards]. Our plan is to create a school where *no child is left behind.* Our vision is to also serve as a national model for university-based charter schools, for best practices in elementary reading, math, science, and social studies instruction, and to develop new paradigms for principal and teacher professional development (University of Texas System, 2002a, p. 14).

This vision clearly states that the School is meant to be an implementation of the key tenets of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

The mission of the School would be three-fold:

1. To provide an excellent education foundation grounded in research based educational practices and the TEKS for a diverse group of students;

2. To serve as a professional development and research outreach for the University of Texas College of Education; and

3. To serve as a model of exemplary programs to other schools. (University of Texas System, 2002a, p. 14).

The following components would guide instruction:

> Curriculum aligned with state standards, materials and assessments, increased and effective use of instructional time, explicit, direct, systematic instruction, on-going assessment for appropriate placement of students in flexible instruction groups, immediate intervention for struggling students, differentiated instruction so that students with similar needs will be grouped together, focused professional development, strong instructional leadership, and vertical and horizontal continuity (University of Texas System, 2002a, p. 15).

Textbook selection would follow the TEA Textbook Division procedures for selecting textbooks. The teachers, principal, and parents would be given an opportunity to review the selections. The final approval would be made by the Management Board.

Finally, the School would evaluate curricular programs using both summative and formative approaches. The Application states that the "Texas Business and Education Coalition has developed a performance management software program that may be used to assist with cost-benefit analysis" (University of Texas System, 2002a, p. 26).

School Created as a Demonstration Site of Best Practices

As described by Treviño (2006) in her study of the School's start-up, the idea for the School represented a confluence of events. The State of Texas had been on the leading edge of reading reform when the accountability movement mobilized itself as a bi-partisan effort to design and pass the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Treviño, who was hired as the principal of the School, explained:

> Politically there was No Child Left Behind from the federal level. There was the Read First Initiative in Texas. There was a change in the charter school legislation which allowed for university-sponsored charter schools. And at the same time that passed and was allowed by Texas Education Agency, the University of Texas created the K-16 initiative (personal communication, October 13, 2004).

A TEA Reading Specialist noted that there wasn't really "any place [in Texas] that pulled it [the Reading Program] all together cohesively and coherently in a way that was 'here's your best case example of how good instruction looks' in pre-K through fifth grade" (Assistant Commissioner, personal communication, October 25, 2004). The education consultant explained, "[The School] really started as a site for demonstrating the implementation of the five components of Scientifically Based Reading Research" (Education Consultant, personal communication, September 29, 2004). The P-16 initiative, *Every Child, Every Advantage*, included as part of its research agenda the creation of an elementary charter school. The focus for the School would be on scientifically based research and best practices. It would demonstrate Texas's approach to reading instruction.

The Chairman of the Board of Regents and others involved in the creation of the School insisted that the children not be used as *guinea pigs* to develop new research.

Rather, the School would use scientifically based research that already had been vetted and deemed worthy of use. The concept of adapting research or testing research was an idea that would come only later with the hiring of the new principal. The Chancellor believed that the School could develop a strategy and plan for educating low-income minority children. The model could include such things as lesson plans, materials, assessments, community building, and parental involvement programs that could be replicated throughout Texas. Scholarly papers could explain the model in a manner that would be understandable and that would work in a variety of circumstances (Treviño, 2006).

Applicable Law and the Management Board

The University Elementary School is governed by Texas law. Most of the applicable law may be found in the Texas Education Code (TEC). However, other applicable statutes are found in the Texas Administrative Code (TAC), which includes rules adopted by the State Board of Education (SBOE). SBOE and commissioner's rules are codified in Title 19, Part II, of the TAC. Title 19 TAC, Chapter 100, is the primary source of rules applying to open-enrollment charter schools. The School is also governed in part by the University System through the Board of Regents Rules and Regulations. The Management Board By-Laws state the following:

> This organization is established by authority of The University of Texas System Board of Regents. The organization will adhere to all applicable provisions of State law and The University of Texas System Regents' Rules and Regulations ("Rules"). In the event a provision in these By-Laws is in conflict with the Regents' Rules, the Regents' Rules shall govern (University of Texas Elementary School Management Board, 2004).

The University Elementary School's Management Board has a membership which must be comprised of 67% or more UT Austin Faculty and Staff. Remaining members come from the community including at least one parent in the School, and the Board must be ethnically diverse. The Board plans to expand to about fifteen members and maintain expertise in finance, real estate development, Texas school law, education, and fundraising.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Elementary School was created in a highly regulative environment. The actors central to its creation were largely aligned with the national and state accountability programs and outlook. Texas had become a leader in scientifically based reading research and was eager to share its model with the nation. To this end, the University System Board of Regents voted to authorize the University to apply for a charter to create an elementary school which would serve as a demonstration site for best practices in an environment of strong requirements for accountability.

Regulations are typically embodiments of the dominant societal viewpoint. They frequently meet with resistance by the entities they are meant to regulate. Critics of NCLB have argued that the legislation has narrowed the curriculum and damaged school morale. The University Elementary School has demonstrated the challenges to schools in an environment of high-stakes accountability. However, the teachers appear to be among the best in the state and have managed not to narrow the curriculum in their efforts to

educate the children. The teachers and administration know that doing well on the tests is one source of legitimacy and that they ignore it at their own risk. The challenge for the practitioner is to balance the regulative requirements with the organization's norms and values.

This research now turns to the actors closest to the action: school administrators, teachers, specialists, parents, and community members. The normative pillar, or lens, helps one see what happened when the School opened its doors and why. Values and norms play a critical role in how the individual actors or agents understand their roles, themselves, their organization, one another, their constituents and clients, and the creators of the organization. Whether or not and to what extent policy is implemented depends in large part how it is perceived and valued.

NORMATIVE/VALUE DRIVEN ELEMENTS

Introduction

The normative conception of institutional elements in organizations relates to the enactment of values that have prescriptive, evaluative, or obligatory dimensions in social life (Scott, 2001). Values are conceptions of what individuals or groups find desirable or preferable. These values are embedded in structures and standards of behavior that can be assessed or compared. Norms tell us how things should be performed or accomplished. They outline the legitimate methods for the pursuit of valued ends (Scott, 2001).

When norms are applicable to sub-sets of an organization, they provide a foundation for the definition of roles, or more specifically, the goals and activities

considered appropriate for an individual in a certain position within an organization. Expectations of behavior are often felt as coercive by the focal actor, but this is a different kind of coercion from the regulative type covered in the first part of Chapter Five. This type of coercion is more often internalized value and thus frequently acceptable to the actors involved. Normative systems, just as regulative or cultural-cognitive systems, both constrain and enable. They grant rights but also require a concomitant responsibility on the part of the individual. The normative conception is primarily sociological in origin. It has to do with social obligation—how something should be according to norms and values of the collective. In this way, institutional norms and values are considered by many theorists to have moral roots.

While the regulative aspect of the School has normative values of efficiency and productivity, and a logic of instrumentality, the central mode of normative and evaluative conceptions is most clearly identified by the roles and expectations of the teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. The logic here is one of appropriateness. The argument asks: Considering my role in this situation, what do people expect of me? Each of these groups of individuals has fairly coherent, expressed goals and senses of obligation. The normative conception is also expressed in certification and accreditation programs. If the teachers and the School can meet certain standards, then it is deemed to embody the values and norms of the accrediting and certifying bodies. For example, the Elementary School hires only certified teachers although it is not required to do so.

This part of the chapter considers the normative, evaluative aspect of the individual and collective actors involved with the Elementary School. Each of the groups—school administrators, teachers, UT faculty, and parents—have strong normative approaches to what they consider to be excellent education for low-SES children. Their attitudes can be defining, sometimes constraining, and at other times enabling, of excellent and equitable education for the students at the Elementary School.

The principal understood that she would require relative autonomy and authority over the curriculum and faculty if she were to be successful in developing an appropriate education for the children. The findings show that the teachers cared deeply about the children and had a sure sense of how to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of each child. The UT faculty was less certain in its initial approach to working with the School but developed, individually and as university departments, many ways of working with the Elementary School that became mutually beneficial. Finally, the parents have selected this school for their children over other alternatives and have primarily been involved and helpful at the school level.

The School Principal

The first staff person to be hired was the Principal, Ramona Treviño. Treviño was, at the time, a very successful principal at one of the elementary schools in the local district. She had been in elementary education administration for 17 years. Treviño knew the institution of public schooling very well. She was "feeling a little fed up with the bureaucracy at [the local school district] and so [she] checked it [the charter school] out"

(Principal, personal communication, October 13, 2004). However, as the candidate for the principal's position reported:

> The story was that [the charter school] had to do with the conservative Republican agenda to support No Child Left Behind, to support the idea of school choice and the charter school movement, and specifically, to support a very strategic approach to reading (Principal, personal communication, October 13, 2004).

The local district Superintendent confirmed Treviño's impression when he outlined what seemed to be a very conservative plan for the School, including Open Court Reading and Saxon Math as two of its major curricular programs (Principal, personal communication, October 13, 2004). Treviño agreed that the School had been conceived as a way to demonstrate best practices that would support the federal initiative NCLB. Treviño, a highly valued employee of the local district, promptly received a promise of a similar position within the district if she would choose to stay rather than leave to start the charter school (Principal, personal communication, October 13, 2004).

After a short negotiation, Treviño accepted the position of principal/CEO of the University Elementary School because she was promised site-based autonomy. Regarding the level of autonomy she required, she said:

> I was given great liberty in determining the actual design and daily operations of the school, and it began to take shape once I was hired as principal. I made it very clear that if I were to take this job, I would have full autonomy in choosing the curriculum and in selecting my staff and the instructional practice that we would be using (Principal, personal communication, October 13, 2004).

The educational consultant who recommended the hiring of Treviño agreed that the principal must have control over specific programs and materials. She said, "If you are accountable, you have to be in charge of selection of curriculum materials and instructional materials. The decision making for the curriculum is left with the

principal/CEO, and that's been a very important factor" (Education Consultant, personal communication, September 29, 2004).

Best Practices From the Principal's Perspective

Another very important normative aspect of the School's start-up was the principal's perspective on what is was meant by the term best practices. Treviño explained that when the issue of best practices comes up in conversation,

> I get a little conflicted because it tends to mean that there's *one right way*—the best way—and my problem with that is that I think any good practice in a classroom should *start with the children* in the room.… I think the balanced approach is best. I talk about balanced reading, balanced math. What is outdated is the homogeneity of learners. We need a variety of instructional strategies [italics added] (Principal, personal communication, October 13, 2005).

Treviño believes that learning is developmentally based. Children learn at different rates and in different ways. Children learn effectively with a balanced approach including instructional strategies that support a richly designed classroom environment, and direct, explicit, systematic instruction. The selection of instructional approach and method will depend on the individual students and on the content and instructional objectives. Sometimes children need more direct, explicit instruction, with strong interventions and support from outside the classroom. The principal said:

> You need to have balance in how much the teacher is giving and what the students are doing. Students need empowerment and time to talk, in talking they are reframing their own ideas and reconstructing, coming to a better understanding (personal communication, October 13, 2005).

Treviño summarizes her stance on best practices:

> There is nothing new under the sun. The pendulum swings back and forth. There are huge ego issues with some of the educators today who are writing the policies.

> They want their 'one right way.' I think that becomes the practice of the time. I subscribe to a 'bag of tricks' idea. A teacher needs to know that there is a variety of practices and the practices should be referenced according to what is happening in the classroom (Principal, personal communication, October 13, 2005).

The new principal came to this position firmly grounded in the idea that learning and teaching have to begin with the child and his or her specific needs. This would permeate the entire curricular program and management of teaching practices at the University Elementary School in the early years.

Teacher Roles

The principal hired several teachers from her former school district and teachers she knew from personal experience. When considering whether or not to join the School, many of the teachers were excited about the possibility of helping to decide how to teach the children. One teacher said she looked forward to:

> …the materials that we were going to use, the pace, the intervention types, feeling some sort of empowerment in the classroom, and creating a vision of the School that I believed worked…instead of being based out of a central office…that really was out of touch with what was going on (Teacher, personal communication, October 25, 2006).

Another teacher explained that he took the position at the School because he wanted to "have the flexibility to be creative" (Teacher, personal communication, October 18, 2006). Another wanted to get back into teaching and determined that this school would provide an excellent opportunity. Clarifying his reasoning, he said, "I like the idea of being able to work at and be part of the University of Texas" (Teacher, personal communication, October 20, 2006). Yet another explained, "I wanted to go somewhere I would be appreciated, where my ideas, my teaching strategies, my teaching pedagogy

would be respected, and maybe my ideas would be acknowledged and I could grow" (Teacher, personal communication, October 27, 2006).

Characteristic of several teachers, the teacher above expressed her attraction to the School as an opportunity to teach children from different backgrounds and not prejudge them (Teacher, personal communication, October 27, 2006). Education, according to one, is not about race, or culture, but rather more about ensuring that everyone has a strong beginning foundation (Teacher, personal communication, May 2, 2006). The principal has made a point of hiring teachers from diverse backgrounds (Administrator, personal communication, January 19, 2007). This has helped solve some of the problems that accrue from the typical configuration of mostly white, female teachers in class with mostly minority children. In a similar vein, one teacher noted that being a teacher in this school offered her an opportunity to create something of value for the lower socio-economic section of the City (Teacher, personal communication, October 11, 2006). Another teacher explained that "it is critical that people learn how to be citizens….We try to teach students how to get along with kids who are different from how they are themselves" (Teacher, personal communication, May 2, 2005).

High-Stakes Testing

The teachers in general expressed their desire for the opportunity to be respected as true professionals, although they recognized that having such autonomy comes with a price. One noted, "At the same time, because we're a charter school, we have a lot to prove, including test score performance" (Teacher, personal communication, October 27,

2006). This same teacher expressed her desire to teach the children how to take multiple choice tests because:

> It's a statewide standardized test. We do have to prove that our children are capable of passing and doing well….As far as what I think about the test, I think that it is *not the only way we should measure our children's performance and ability* [italics added] (Teacher, personal communication, October 27, 2006).

In fact, the School performed well on the tests. They were classified as "Recognized," next to the highest tier in the first year of testing, and barely missed the highest possible category of "Exemplary" in the second year. Nevertheless, a tension is created because the test scores matter tremendously to the founders of the School and to others, including donors and potential donors. The educational consultant declared, "The worst thing in the world is to have the Elementary School rated 'A*cceptable*.' That would not be good" (Education Consultant, personal communication, September 29, 2004).

The standardized testing has taken its toll on teacher morale. While the teachers recognize the need for children to pass the exams in order to succeed academically according to state standards, most of the teachers believe the state testing requirements are a negative influence on teaching and learning. In general, the narrowly drawn high-stakes testing environment is not conducive to fulfilling the full potential of the children's academic promise. During the weeks when the School was pressing hard to prepare for the test, one teacher said her colleagues are definitely stressed. She sees them and hears them—not just at the Elementary School but in all the schools. The teachers sometimes feel like they are "drowning" from the weight of the pressure (Treviño, 2006, p.158).

Another reported, “Once I got into a testing grade, it wasn’t just the testing. It was also the paper work increasing that year. Assessment in general increases the amount of paperwork you have” (Teacher, personal communication, October 20, 2006).

The stress on the teachers and administrators of high-stakes testing is amplified by the fact that the School is a demonstration site where everyone is looking at the bottom-line, at the numbers. Because of the university sponsorship of this demonstration site, teachers feel that there is significant power and pressure from the University. This situation is immensely stressful according to many of the teachers at the School. All that power—all that pressure—trickles down. “There are expectations of the principal. These pass down to the teachers and we pass them down to the parents and children to help me help the principal help UT. *The University is part of TEA/NCLB* [italics added]” (Teacher, personal communication, October 18, 2006). The principal agrees that the test is driving too much of the curriculum. Referring to the factory model, she observed that we have locked ourselves in a box—what is required during a specific period of time for the kids to achieve particular test outputs—in which standards are driving the test and the test is driving the curriculum. A teacher or administrator might know that there is progress and that “your practices are providing effective results but you won’t end up being very efficient if the kids don’t pass the test and are possibly retained. So that is the pressure, that is the biggest tension right there” (Principal, personal communication, February 11, 2005).

University Faculty Values and Norms

The University of Texas faculty, in the aggregate, took some time getting used to the idea that the University had decided to start a charter school. The principal has worked hard to involve the faculty in the School:

> Everywhere, from the Provost Office to the faculty at the College of Education, I've just completely held my head up, felt very confident about the mission that we're here for, listened very carefully to what some of the faculty's ideas were, and worked really hard to get them involved, and in doing that, it has shaped the program (Principal, personal communication, October 13, 2004).

According to the Vice Chancellor, it seemed natural for there to be questioning and some resistance. He said:

> Anytime, almost regardless of the issue, if a decision to create a significant program is made at the very top of an organization—in other words, if it doesn't bubble up in the University from down below, at the faculty level or departmental or college or school level—it is almost 100% positive that there will be resistance, just if for no other reason than the very fact that it wasn't initiated or wasn't carefully contemplated or discussed with the groups that had interest in it (Vice Chancellor, personal communication, February 9, 2006).

In a similar vein, Treviño noted there were faculty within the College of Education who were concerned that the Elementary School represented a conservative educational agenda. "Professors had not been informed or surveyed as to the purpose of the School and its possible impact on their work. It was a top-down decision from the highest levels of governance and many were leery of its political agenda" (Treviño, 2006, p. 96).

Eventually, however, faculty were recruited and supported through relationships with the School's principal and with the Management Board. The issue of appropriate faculty involvement came to the fore. There would be opportunities for assisting teachers through professional development and consulting on instructional strategies and research.

Several faculty members were interviewed who have been involved with the School's curriculum development and teacher professional development. When the issue of best practices was discussed, one faculty member said, "The classroom teachers need to articulate their philosophy. We can give them advice, interpret the research and bring it to their attention, but the teacher ultimately has to decide what is best for them" (Faculty, personal communication, March 9, 2005). Another concurred: "Of course the teachers come with their own unique experiences about what constitutes *best practices* and so we try to support them with the appropriate research to back up what they intuitively feel is the right practice" (Faculty, personal communication, March 8, 2005).

One of the first math strategies to be adopted by the School was Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI), which was being researched at the University. This instructional strategy is a particularly good example of an approach that complements, but is very different from the direct, explicit instruction that was to be the backbone of the School's instructional approach, according to the charter application. The CGI strategy supports constructivist learning and provides balance to the originally proposed instructional strategy of direct, explicit instruction

In a similar fashion, the 3-Tier Reading Model was developed at the University and made part of the School's program. The Reading Model is designed to meet the instructional needs of all readers at the School. It is aimed at catching students before they fall behind and providing the support they need. The 3-Tier Reading Model provides a safety net for struggling readers. The Model consists of three levels. Tier I is the core classroom instruction and normally meets the needs of most of the students. Tier II

provides supplemental instruction in the classroom for the students who need extra support. Tier III provides intensive intervention and support for the readers who are not able to read effectively using the first two levels of instruction.

The faculty who are involved with the Elementary School appear to agree with the principal's view that balanced programs should be the norm at the School. Children are developmentally different and have varying learning styles and needs. The School supports an array of instructional approaches to meet the needs of each child.

Faculty members sit on the Management Board and the Education Council. They participate in many events and activities held at the School. Many faculty members from several university departments and colleges have been involved with the School. While thorough research remains to be performed on the University faculty involvement, there are indications that the engagement has been widespread throughout the University and responsive to the needs of the Elementary School. There are representatives from the College of Education, internships from the School of Nursing, social workers from the School of Social Work, a speech therapist from the College of Communications, and a school psychologist from the department of Education Psychology.

Parents' and Community Members' Values and Norms

The research showed that families and community members involved in the School were central to the normative aspects of the school community. Respect, development, and support of parents and community members worked to empower and motivate the diverse community. According to the principal, the University exerted great

effort toward accommodating parents and community members in creating the School. She wrote, "They knew it provided a way for the people of East Austin to connect with the University in a way that had never happened before" (Treviño, 2006, p. 84). This notion supports a general concern of higher-level university administration that the University needs to develop goodwill in its East Austin relations and, at the same time, attract students of diversity in the future.

Parents frequently cite the opportunities for students to learn beyond the basics and to learn in a small school as reasons for families to select the School for their children. The University Elementary is a small school. For many parents, it feels like an extended family (Parent, personal communication, May 19, 2005). Education of the whole child (Noddings, 2005b), which encourages a focus on the child's academic achievement, personal growth, social skills, and psychological development, is an important part of the School. This notion aligns with Valenzuela's concept of *educación*. "*Educación* is a conceptually broader term than its English language cognate. It refers to the family's role of inculcating in children a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility and serves as the foundation for all other learning…" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 23).

Clearly, the families and community members care deeply for their children. Parents have chosen to send their children to this school, which has helped to create a strong commitment on the part of the parents and families (Viteritti, 1999). An administrator at the School reported that compared to other schools, the parents at the Elementary School are very involved. After all, these parents chose to be at the

Elementary School. She asked, "What kind of parent went out of the way to be at this school? It's going to be the parent who at another school would be very active, involved" (Administrator, personal communication, October 12, 2006). The principal, thinking back on the first parent meeting when many families arrived bedecked in University attire, the children in University of Texas T-shirts with orange and white bows in their hair and University of Texas socks on their feet, pointed out that "UT to them is like a dream…to think that their children would be at a school sponsored by UT was really a pretty big deal…so the parents are very happy, I think" (Administrator, personal communication, October 13, 2004). Parents are inspired to know that the School has a strong, stable, thriving sponsor. The University means success and hope for the future. The children are uniformed in Little Longhorn outfits and sing the school song to the tune of the University's alma mater.

Parents and families are excited to participate in the Elementary School. One teacher was quite surprised by the amount of parental involvement in his classroom. On the first day of school not only did he meet his students, but also he met all of the parents. In his previous experience, there had been few or no parents. At the Elementary School, parent involvement is a strong expectation which parents meet fully.

> I wasn't used to their asking me on the first day: 'How can I help you? What can I do?' I wasn't used to all that. They were asking for my wish list. They were coming with bags of snacks. I wasn't used to any of that. Wow! They're really participating (Teacher, personal communication, October 18, 2006).

The parents are also very interested in knowing that their children will pass the state standardized test. One teacher said, "The parents are scared about their kids passing the

test" (Teacher, personal communication, October 20, 2006). The parents know that high-stakes testing is a present reality, whether they like it or not. The teachers are aware of the related pressures the parents feel. They are also aware that these pressures are heightened for the Elementary School parents. "I get the sense from the parents that one of the reasons they enroll their children here is because they want more rigor, they want a little more than what their child would be receiving in other schools in the area" (Teacher, personal communication, October 18, 2006). In response to the parental desire to have their children achieve, the same teacher noted, "Everything is one notch up here in the standards in my opinion. And that's what the parents want" (Teacher, personal communication, October 18, 2006).

The administration cares about parents both on a daily basis but also in terms of the School's future sustainability. A University faculty member explained how the Elementary School includes parents in decision-making at the School:

> I see parents represented on the Education Council. I see it at parent-teacher meetings. I see it as the parents come pick up their kids. I think there is a very refreshing and legitimate value of parent involvement. The principal and the administration seem very open to the parents (Faculty, personal communication, December 5, 2006).

Parents have multiple opportunities to participate in the School. The Principal's Coffee, Parent Forum meetings, parent letters, parent contracts, the parent handbook, and the school website provide venues for parents to express their concerns, ask questions, or just observe their child's school in action (Treviño, 2006). This involvement comes, in part, because many of the children come from families with a long history in the community itself. Many of the University Elementary School's students come from families that have

deep, deep roots in the community. “Their grandparents and great grandparents still live here. They’re just following in the tradition. They’re going to be successful citizens in the future in this community here” (Teacher, personal communication, October 18, 2006). In fact, the grandparents of many of the students were the guardians of their grandchildren and they participated as actively as did the parents of other students.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Teachers, administrators, parents, and community members appeared to be focused on the individual child and his or her needs. Evidence supported a view that these professionals and community members work together for the good of the children. While reality presents a high-stakes testing environment, this situation was not the preferred focus of the teachers, administrators, or parents. Everyone interviewed, from the University faculty to the parents themselves, hoped to make a significant difference in the lives of these children. This approach was the prevailing normative mode of the School community.

CULTURAL-COGNITIVE ELEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Scott’s third conceptual category of institutional theory emphasizes the cultural-cognitive elements of organizations in their institutionalized environments. This conception comes principally from anthropology and sociology. It focuses on the “shared

conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made" (Scott, 2001, p. 57). In this conception, the theorist asks: In what ways is knowledge constrained, supported and classified?

This institutional lens helps us see the cognitive dimension of human life. Interceding between environmental stimuli and the individual are the internalized, symbolic representations of the world that help us understand our environment and help give meaning to objects and activities. Reminiscent of Max Weber's thinking, action is social only to the degree that the individual attaches meaning to it. Scott hyphenates the term because the external cultural frameworks shape the internal interpretations (Scott, 2001).

Cultural-cognitive theorists believe that this grouping is the one most likely to resist change. For many people, thinking about taken-for-granted assumptions is out of the question. Thinking *outside the box* is an uncommon talent. Behavior is usually constrained and supported by the ways in which knowledge is created, codified and bound. Culture is defined in its simplest form as *the way we do things*. Cultural-cognitive legitimacy is measured by the degree of cultural support enjoyed by the organization. Common understandings develop that at once enlighten and blind us to alternative meanings. Local contexts influence local understanding, but they are also influenced by wider belief systems and outlooks. For example, the propensity in the United States is to revere the individual and to support rational choice as a primary approach to preference. This perspective has a clear impact on the accountability movement at the national level and the perception of high-stakes testing at the local level. Using this conceptual lens to

understand the Elementary School should shed light on the implications of diverse cultures intersecting for a common purpose.

This part of the chapter considers shared assumptions and beliefs of the various stakeholders regarding schooling in general and the Elementary School in particular. The local school district was strongly opposed to the charter school's creation because it found it to be threatening. The local community was mixed though it was generally supportive of the opportunity the School provided the children. Once the School was launched, it became clear that the affiliation with the University would be central to the development of the School's culture.

From the viewpoint of the teachers and administrations, the concepts of teaching and learning were highlighted as being particularly cognitive in nature. While this perception seems like common sense, it is not the typical approach to public school teaching and learning. Parents have their children's futures at heart and seem willing to follow the direction provided by the Elementary School teachers and administration. This situation may change as the parents grow in their understanding of various instructional strategies and philosophical approaches. In addition, the Education Council plays a large role in developing the education plan, representing University faculty, parents and the community, teachers and administration.

SHARED ASSUMPTIONS AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

One of the best ways to uncover the cultural-cognitive element is to reveal the assumptions that are shared by the various groups involved in the School. For example,

one of the basic beliefs that pervade teacher perceptions is the assumption that all children can learn. A belief that parents have regarding their children's education is that their children deserve a high quality education such as the one offered by the University. This discussion, then, differentiates and exemplifies the various sub-cultures and their expectations, beliefs, and assumptions regarding the education at the Elementary School. This section begins with a discussion of the local public school culture. How did the neighboring school district receive the plan for the School? Next, the shared assumptions and general perspective of the shared culture between the University and the School are discussed. This shared culture centers primarily on the symbolic and mythic issues embodied by the "Little Longhorns." The next section explores the cultural-cognitive mindset of the teachers and administration regarding the nature of teaching and learning. Here we find that the educators at the Elementary School have very strong views of how children learn and how they are most effectively taught. This part of the chapter ends by looking at the beliefs and assumptions that parents have about schooling in general and this school in particular. The shared assumptions in the parent community are an important element in the children's education and academic success.

The Neighboring School District

When the State Board of Education held its hearing in 2002 to consider the application from the UT Board of Regents for an elementary charter school, the response by the local public school district was not surprising. Charter schools have become a divisive issue among supporters of public schools.

During the hearing, the representative of the District spoke on behalf of the local school district's interests. The district representative declared, "The District Advisory Council (DAC) of [the neighboring school district] would like to express its vigorous objection and opposition to the application of the University of Texas for the creation of the University of Texas Elementary Charter School" (Austin Independent School District, 2002). The district representative articulated the most significant objections "with the hope that the application as currently described will be flatly denied." The school district's primary objections were as follows:

1. Implementing the charter school will hinder AISD's efforts to raise academic achievement for all students.

2. The charter school will not be able to replicate its methods across districts.

3. The alternative models created by the charter school would be of greater benefit if the University would collaborate with the school district to create such a school (Austin Independent School District, 2002).

The local school district representative testified during the hearings that because the University has chosen to locate the School in an area where there has been recent, significant improvement in elementary school education, the addition of this charter school might attract the most capable students, thereby diluting the continued improvement efforts. Most of the needy students would not apply to the charter school due to cultural, economic, transportation, social and language hurdles, leaving the strong students and active families to self-select into the lottery from which the student population would be drawn (Austin Independent School District, 2002).

The school district was also concerned about the loss of operating funds. The numbers of the students lost would not be great enough, they argued, to reduce the

number of classrooms, but it takes much needed monies away from the district in the form of Weighted Average Daily Attendance funds (WADA). The Chairman of the Board of Regents responded to the district's complaint that they would lose funds, "If the students leave, they [the district] don't have to educate them. They don't have to spend the money. The school district doesn't own those kids" (Peterson, 2002).

Perhaps most pointedly, the school district complained that this situation sent the wrong message to the public. "The Board of Regents' pompous proclamation that 'We can do it better' should be expanded to acknowledge that the improvement will be for a few, to the detriment of the many" (Austin Independent School District, 2002). The school district did not believe that the school would be able to effectively share its practices with the district or with other schools.

Finally, there was a concern that if enough students were siphoned off, the school district might have to close down a school, which is "NOT the message that a public school district wants to send to its constituents and stakeholders" [emphasis included], (Austin Independent School District, 2002). The district representative asked:

> What good will come of proving that a school can succeed when it has a high-quality faculty, experienced and professional administrators, a fully developed, highly detailed, and explicitly articulated curriculum, fully supportive parents and community, supplemental financial and operational resources, and a select group of students (Austin Independent School District, 2002)?

The school district declared in its memorandum, "The University has chosen to reject offers from the neighboring school district to collaborate on this worthy educational effort" (Austin Independent School District, 2002). The memorandum explained that the University Board of Regents was steamrolling the local community's

"right, responsibility, privilege, and obligation to define and implement the appropriate strategies and tactics for improving education for all our students" (Austin Independent School District, 2002).

However, not everyone in the East Austin community agreed with the local school district. "We are hoping this will bring a challenge to AISD and a change here for our community," said a former member of the Austin City Planning Commission and president of the Barrio Unido neighborhood association (Jayson, 2002b). Another community leader asserted, "This is not a campus for kids who are already succeeding. This is a campus to reach out and help educate young people who are struggling at the system presently" (Jayson, 2002b). Further, another local leader with El Concilio, a coalition of Mexican Americans in East Austin, had worked with the University on education issues for decades. The El Concilio representative explained:

> We understand the politics of this school here. In the last few years after 1995 we have been making alliances with NAACP, with LULAC, and actually came out with an initiative that we felt was important for our community. We saw the decline after desegregation, after AISD tried to get out of the federal mandate of desegregating the schools. Kids were falling behind. At one point, the Concilio in the late 90's actually publicly asked to secede from AISD (Community Leader, personal communication, September 26, 2006).

The President of El Concilio concurred: "We are whole heartedly endorsing the idea of UT opening a charter school in our community given the unfortunate situation with the [neighboring school district] and its lack of quality education it's given our community" (Pace, 2002b). A community leader said, "What I hear from the parents is that they want the best education possible for their kids. They want their kids to go to college" (Community Leader, personal communication, September 26, 2006).

The Elementary School is a topic of interest in the community. The School is considered to be part of the University and part of the tradition of public schooling. On several occasions, participants in the School expressed a dislike of charter schools in general, but found this School to be an asset to the community. The principal, a community leader, and others asked that the word "charter" be removed from the name of the School because it was confusing to the public (Community Leader, personal communication, September 26, 2006; Principal, personal communication, October 13, 2004; University of Texas Elementary School Management Board, 2003).

Improved Relationship with East Austin

The University's relationship with the East Austin neighborhood has improved tremendously due to the active involvement of the University in the development of the University Elementary School. The relationship between the University and East Austin had been difficult and contentious over the years. Peterson reported in *Texas Observer* that:

> The University of Texas is crossing I-35 again. Last time it made a foray into East Austin, in the 1980's, it tried to annex Blackland, a low-income, predominantly African American neighborhood.… The University's thwarted attempt to buy up all the homes in the area enraged a generation of East Austinites (Peterson, 2002).

From East Austin's viewpoint, the University had not been consistent and reliable. The education consultant who developed the charter school's business plan and application to the State Board of Education reported that during a public hearing on whether or not to start the charter school, a gentleman from the community stood up and said, "[The University] has disappointed us…time after time after time. If you guys back down on

this, we will never trust you again" (Education Consultant, personal communication, September 29, 2004). A University faculty member noted that "it is not a coincidence that [the School] is located in East Austin and that there is a population of kids that are normally under-represented and underperforming in kind of more traditional school settings" (Faculty, personal communication, December 5, 2006).

A school teacher from a high-performing elementary school just two blocks away from the University Elementary School expressed concern that the University of Texas was coming into an area with an attitude that it could improve education and yet there was little communication with the communities involved (University of Texas System, 2002a, p. 235). Several examples help explain this concern. A member of the UT System Board of Regents was quoted in the *Texas Observer* as saying, "We can do it [delivery of education] better" (Peterson, 2002). The co-president of Education Austin, a professional association of educators, said, "UT is not known for its collaborative spirit with the community…There is a little too much hubris among the decision-makers at the university" (Pace, 2002a).

On a positive note, the Dean of the College of Education asserted that he has "a fundamental belief that every child can learn given the opportunity. This School is creating a remarkable opportunity for young people and to transform lives. It shows a tremendous respect for all children and their potential" (Treviño, 2006, p. 100). Investing in that particular part of town by developing a charter school would provide an opportunity for the University to live up to its promise and to serve as a gateway to the University for these minority populations. The Provost said, "This School sets the stage

for people in the community to have their expectations totally transformed concerning what the University can do and how they think of the University" (Provost, personal communication, October 27, 2004). With the demographics rapidly changing, it would be necessary to encourage greater numbers of minority youth to become college ready and join the universities and colleges in Texas in preparation for employment and successful participation in society (Paredes, 2006).

The Chairman of the University System Board of Regents, who was also a member of the Governor's Business Council, said, "Unless we do the right things in K through 12, nothing we do in higher education will fix the access problem. The number of disadvantaged students who are well prepared for college is far too small" (Governor's Business Council, 2002, p. 45).

The Little Longhorn Culture

The students and their families appear to be delighted and inspired by their new affiliation with the University. Out of all the elements that help develop the spirit of the School, it is this affiliation which seems most uplifting. A school administrator explained:

> I think the most important thing for the students here at UT is that they are part of something special. When I was in elementary school, I didn't know anything about college. My parents didn't graduate from college. These kids know that. They have access. All their teachers went to college (Administrator, personal communication, October 12, 2006).

Each morning the entire student body meets with the faculty and administration (including many parents) to start the day on a positive note. The students say the pledge of allegiance in English and Spanish, recite their "Little Longhorn" pledge, and share

stories of new siblings and family events. They sing their morning song, share birthday announcements, and present new siblings with a "baby longhorn" bib and a new book. The morning assembly is also a time for honoring achievements, reminding the students of appropriate behavior, and for announcements of upcoming study trips and planned visits by community and university leaders (Author, personal observations, 2006).

The Little Longhorns are reminded frequently of their connection to the University. The University mentors their teachers, the students have student interns from the University on a regular basis, the University provides interns from the School of Nursing, social workers from the School of Social Work, and a school psychologist from the Department of Education Psychology. Moreover, the University and its supporters have made significant donations of materials, often adorned with the Longhorn logo. A number of people from the University community are involved with the School in helpful and supportive ways—education students, academics, even prominent athletes (Faculty, personal communication, January 9, 2007).

Stories about the University proliferate at the School. Many stories are about the University and its colors, its athletic success, and visits by university administrators and faculty members. When the University won the national football championship recently, the game's hero became yet another symbol of the School's stature. As Treviño (2006) wrote in her study of the School, the symbols of success represent the result of "disciplined practice, perseverance, and teamwork" (p. 198), all marks of the strong potential for academic achievement.

The School Administrators and Teachers: Cultural-Cognitive Perspectives on Teaching and Learning

The principal's view of teaching and learning pervades the entire School. She has made it clear that "the important piece is being diagnostic and prescriptive" (Principal, personal communication, October 6, 2006). She hires teachers who agree with her approach and who understand the importance of teaching to the needs of each child. These teachers are also hired for their orientation toward learning and interest in sharing their insights and working as a team to help assure the success of each child. Treviño says, "Kids come in different packages. You have to know your learners!" (Principal, personal communication, October 6, 2006). The School's motto, "Teach to the Spirit of Every Child," is exemplified in several formal and informal ways. From the frequent praise for appropriate behavior to the music played in the background during class, teachers clearly take each individual's development seriously (Teacher, personal communication, October 18, 2006).

Many of the teachers hired by the principal came from a school where they had created an award-winning "Blue Ribbon" school. They brought the notion with them that they are successful educators and that they could replicate this success in their new school. One administrator said, "I knew the work we did at [our former school] was outstanding and amazing…I loved sharing our work" (Administrator, personal communication, October 12, 2006). The same administrator said, "I expect that these teachers truly believe that all children can learn at a very high standard, and that they expect them to do so (Administrator, personal communication, October 12, 2006). The culture is one of high expectations, rigor, and care.

The teachers recognize the importance of knowing their students and their needs. One teacher explained, "It takes a lot of observing while you are teaching.…Everyone cares about the success of these 220 children" (Teacher, personal communication, October 18, 2006). Another teacher described her interest in developing community in her classroom where she believes that decision-making should be collective, that all schools are for the children and decision-making should reflect that. She thinks, "We should include parents and community and even the children in decision-making when we want to change something. There are a lot of choices I allow them to make" (Teacher, personal communication, October 27, 2006). This teacher elaborated:

> Kids are our future. They are like sponges. They take everything in and with that I think there comes a certain delicacy that as a teacher I am responsible for embracing their individuality and through that expanding their knowledge and helping them become life-long learners (Teacher, personal communication, October 27, 2006).

By embracing each child, this teacher knows that she is showing respect for the student individuality.

The teachers have high expectations of their students, but they also know that the principal, the Management Board, and others have high expectations of the teachers. A teacher explained:

> When you get into a public school, especially urban districts, so big that it is hard to implement things and get them started and get everyone trained. Here it is like you've got it, now do it. Get it, got it, and now play it through. We're expected to do that (Teacher, personal communication, October 27, 2006).

Sometimes this situation feels like pressure to the teachers (Administrator, personal communication, October 6, 2006). A teacher echoes, "I think we are expected to be

miracle workers. You're supposed to be good at everything at all times" (Teacher, personal communication, October 20, 2006).

Parents and Community: Their Beliefs and Participation

Parents come with their beliefs and assumptions about schooling in general and this school in particular. There are assumptions that this school will be different and special but not so different that it can not be considered a legitimate. The School is expected to be extraordinary in its ability to combine high expectations and rigorous learning opportunities with a nurturing, caring support of each child. The School's administration supports high expectations of parent involvement. An administrator reported:

> I expect the parents to do their very best for their children every day, to be partners with teacher and administrator. The three of us together—the administrator, teacher, parent—are going to have to give and take, have to let some things go and take some things with us when we have a good partnership with them (Administrator, personal communication, October 12, 2006).

Research has shown that students who appear to need strict discipline and to require high expectations of obedience are often the ones who would benefit the most from open, caring, and supportive atmospheres coupled with high expectations of *academic achievement* and cooperative behavior (Solomon, Battistich, Kim, & Watson, 1997). A central finding in the resilience research is that the value exists not in the programmatic approaches but in the relationships among people in a common enterprise. Parents have multiple avenues for communication and involvement with the Elementary School, both formal and informal. The teachers and administrators are clearly dedicated

to the proposition of parental involvement and inclusion. As one parent of two Little Longhorns put it, “Parents have helped make the decisions here. It’s what my husband and I wanted—more community involvement” (University of Texas Elementary School, 2006b). The resultant relationships help build the resiliency—or the ability to bounce back—from adversity and stress.

There is ample evidence in the Elementary School of respect and care for each child. The classrooms reflect and honor student work and student life stories with pictures and cut-outs displayed on the walls and doors and suspended from the ceilings. Occupational charts show the students’ names next to their expected or possible careers. The months of the year are annotated with names and birthdays of the children in the class. Character traits such as respect, caring, honesty, courage, and perseverance are listed with various student names attached to each attribute. The examples of artifacts that focus on the children are nearly endless (Author, personal observations, 2007). Research shows that teacher practices that are pro-social (intended to help others), such as asking for the students’ thinking, encouraging student expression of ideas, encouraging cooperation, and being warm and supportive, are related to positive student behaviors and stimulate the students’ sense of community. Feelings of belonging, safety, and security are vital to children’s social and emotional development (Solomon et al., 1997).

Parents express a strong desire to be involved with their children’s education. In many ways, however, parents and others have fairly well defined concepts of a *real school* and how it should be (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). If people stray too far from this, their ideas lose power and legitimacy. Tyack and Cuban have described the American

concept of schooling in their book, *Tinkering toward Utopia*. Because people attend school and many individuals work in schools, there is a fairly clear idea in our collective thinking of what school is. Reforms that stray too far from how we think of schooling may meet insurmountable objections. Perhaps that is why so few reforms are sustainable. Teachers and others frequently side-step or reformulate the policies and directions handed down from administration:

> Reformers who want to change the grammar of schooling today need to enlist the support of parents, school boards, and the community more generally. Participation of the public in school decision-making can, of course, lead to conflict and seem to threaten professional autonomy. But in a democracy, fundamental reforms that seek to alter the cultural constructions of a real school cannot succeed without lengthy and searching public dialogue about the ends and means of schooling (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 109).

An example of the need to work with parents and their expectations of schooling is shown by the scheduling challenges that must coordinate with the schedules of the student siblings who attend other schools. For example, if the Elementary School wishes to add to the length of the school year or to schedule staff development days, the school administrators must consult the families regarding transportation needs and family vacations (University of Texas Elementary School Education Council, 2004).

Parent participation is very important. A recent effort to enlist the participation of the parents and community to help design the permanent school building was met with enthusiasm and engagement. Parents, children, community members, and others were invited to express their concerns and wishes for the new building. Including the School community in this manner helped to develop an improved design and to show support and respect for the various perspectives.

According to the School's Policy Manual (University of Texas Elementary School, 2006a), the School is served by an independent, formal organization of parents called the University Elementary School Parent Forum. The Parent Forum is incorporated, with officers, by-laws, and regular meetings and activities. It holds a strategic planning retreat each June. A mission statement for the School, a vision statement, common beliefs, and goals and objectives are reviewed during this retreat. The mission of the Parent Forum is:

> To unify the efforts of the parents and the professional educators of the School community served by University of Texas Elementary School to assist students in acquiring academic skills and in developing individual talents and social abilities to their individual capacities, and to maximize the mission of *teaching to the spirit of every child* (University of Texas Elementary School Parent Forum, 2005).

However, the Parent Forum is advisory only. It is not a legal part of the School, nor does it have regulatory authority over the School. It is similar to parent-teacher organizations in traditional schools.

The Elementary School is also served by a site-based committee, the Education Council, designed for the purpose of improving the educational outcomes of the students. It consists of three professional staff (at a minimum), three parents, three university faculty, one community member, one business representative, and the principal/CEO, or designee, of the School. The final approval of new council members is made by the principal/CEO of the Elementary School (University of Texas Elementary School, 2006a). According to the Policy Manual, the objectives of the Education Council are to present the state-required "School Report Card" to parents and community, review School programs and services, help establish goals for academic improvement, develop

the education and staff development plans, review student achievement data, inform the community of School progress, review and provide recommendations on the use of budget and federal dollars, and share meeting dates, agendas, and minutes with School community members. The Education Council has played an important part in the School's planning and development.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The cultural-cognitive conception helps us understand how the various stakeholders perceive the Elementary School. The neighboring school district displayed an antipathy toward the charter school, which reflected a general sentiment toward charter schools in the public school environment. However, the families involved in the Elementary School are appreciative of the opportunity to send their children to a school that can provide an excellent and equitable education to their children.

Clearly, the common focus at the School is on the individual child and the diagnostic prescriptive approach to meeting each child's needs in a responsive and timely manner. High expectations of academic achievement are combined with a concern for the social-emotional needs of the whole child. Research supports the balanced approach. Parent involvement is a key aspect of the School and is exemplified in valued participation in the Parent Forum and in the Education Council.

CHAPTER SIX: INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND POLICY

INTRODUCTION

This case study highlights the critical need for a comprehensive evaluation of the narrowly drawn accountability system in use by public education today. To analyze the complex institution of schooling, the researcher has used New Institutional Theory to clarify the various pressures and supports placed upon schooling in today's political and social climate. In particular, the research evaluates what seems to be a divide between the founding impetus of the Elementary School and the reality of diverse needs of individual students and their families.

This research supports the notion that best practice or exemplary practice be defined in ways that allow the professionalism of the teacher to meet the needs of the individual child and local circumstance. Children learn in different ways and differently throughout their development. The teacher is close to the student and understands the student's situation more clearly than actors external to the learning activity. As cited in Chapter 1, the American Productivity and Quality Center highlights the nature of best practice as a relationship-driven activity with organizational and individual learning at its center. However, schooling gains its legitimacy from what society thinks school should be. If passing the high-stakes test is required for legitimacy, then this is where much of a school's energy will be focused. In the past, a kind of loose-coupling protected the technical core of schooling from institutional forces for change, but this situation is no

longer the case. The coupling is tightening as the market-driven, business community is demanding accountability that effectively reaches into the classroom and causes the teaching and learning to be clearly aligned with the high-stakes testing program. This tightening, however, is accompanied by a loss of educational excellence and equity contrary to the stated purpose of the No Child Left Behind Act.

It is becoming clear that education policy must be designed with a stronger responsiveness to individual students, teachers, schools, and communities. One-size-fits-all does not serve students and their families effectively. Standardized testing has had a tremendous impact on classrooms across the country. Nationwide, there have been many instances of high-stakes testing damaging teacher morale, negatively impacting student spirit and school-community relations, encouraging cheating by administrators and teachers, and causing a significant loss of instructional time (Foster, 2004). Very recently, a large study by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) (2007) indicated that children are still being taught in traditional ways with a strong emphasis on a transmission model of instruction despite significant research that shows the value of an exploratory learning environment. The NICHD study found that the children have less than a 20% chance of consistent exposure to a rich classroom experience in their elementary years. Although educators speak favorably of cooperative learning and exploration, this national study showed the bulk of class time was spent with children in their seats listening to a teacher or working alone. The researchers found that for fifth graders, working in small groups, fostering social skills and critical thinking, occurred only 7% of the time. This frequency is consistent at less than 10% across all

first, third, and fifth grade classes observed. According to the study, "High-quality teaching challenges children to use reasoning, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, with lots of teacher-student interaction, and it involves emotionally supportive interactions and engaging activities but that kind of experience is not typical" (University of Virginia, 2007). One of the teachers at the Elementary School put it this way:

> In the best classroom, learning for a child should be to have all the opportunities to—let's say we're learning about the solar system, the stars, the moon, the planets—be given all opportunities in different ways to learn that particular topic where it's not all just textbook based where it's just reading and discussion—they're given more opportunities to see things visually and incorporate lessons for all different types of learners (Teacher, personal communication, October 18, 2006).

The principal supports this approach. In a discussion about best practices, she said there should be multi-sensory approaches to instruction. "When we say best practices, there are many levels to it…small group, whole group, grade level, school as a whole, and the community. These all must be considered" (Principal, personal communication, February 11, 2005). It is important to note, however, that the teachers are not in denial about the test or the importance of the test in today's political environment. "Right now we're given a TAKS test and that's the way we are holding teachers and students accountable. Whether it's the best fit for everyone, I don't think so" (Teacher, personal communication, October 27, 2006).

The University Elementary School was founded by the University System to embody the mandate of No Child Left Behind. NCLB was itself developed in a highly regulative environment including standards-based accountability and high-stakes testing. The Elementary School, however, has modified the original focus on instruction from

what was planned to be primarily direct, explicit, and systematic instruction to an instructional focus that balances pedagogical strategies to support an environment which places student efforts for understanding at the center of the learning experience. The modified approach incorporates direct instruction as needed by individual children at particular times in their learning experience and for specific learning outcomes. The principal says, "Some kids need a little bit more explicit instruction. It depends on their learning style" (Principal, personal communication, October 13, 2004). Additionally, particular content may require a focus on either direct, explicit instruction or one that supports a focus on the individual learner's approach to making meaning of the lesson. The administration and teachers require the flexibility to select among instructional strategies.

The State Board of Education charter application supports the use of high-stakes testing for selected grades. The School has no choice but to accept this constraint; however, it is clear that while there are some significant benefits to testing, the testing program negatively impacts the learning inside the classroom. The findings indicate that the teachers feel compelled to prepare the children well for success in passing the test. They not only have to be careful in selecting which content to emphasize, but they are careful to teach the children how to take the multiple choice tests, including a focus on test-taking strategies. The children learn what it means to eliminate obvious wrong answers and how to detect answers that look right but aren't the best answer. The children learn how the state measures learning, what the state thinks the children should

learn, and that learning these things to pass the test is appropriate. The children are also learning that high levels of stress are part of the school experience.

This chapter addresses the key issues dealt with by the School that embody and demonstrate the School's implementation of its mission. These include understanding the purpose of the School, the importance of student voice, the significance of school community and school climate, including caring and respect for diverse cultures, and finally, the critical element of high expectation for student achievement. The chapter includes a discussion of these cultural issues by considering the School's research base, community of practice, and reflection on the current narrowly drawn accountability movement. The final sections of the chapter address the need for comprehensive change in the institution of schooling and the implications for future research and policy design.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL?

Over the past two decades or more, schooling in the United States has been focused almost exclusively on preparing students for the workforce. The needs of the economy have been a standardizing force. Applying business principles to the operations of schooling has also had a regulating effect on the institution of schooling, with the attendant quantitative measures of achievement and emphasis on cost control. Public schools are responsible for providing education for both the workforce and for citizenship. This responsibility is not always evident, as Alfie Kohn (1991) argued over a decade ago:

> At a tender age, children learn not to be tender. A dozen years of schooling often do nothing to promote generosity or a commitment to the welfare of others. To the contrary, students are graduated who think that being smart means looking out for number one (pp. 496-497).

The economic and social goals of education must be reconciled. Children need to be prepared to make a living *and* make a life (Hargreaves, 2003).

Padilla (2005) suggests that these differing viewpoints are cultural issues and must be researched as such. Individualism is strongly supported by a culture of measurement, while a community view is supported by a culture of engagement. While any dualistic schema between the regulative focus and the normative focus tends to overstate the differences, this distinction is insightful. It points to the variation in the purpose of education—that of workforce development and individual success versus that of community building and civic engagement. Both are necessary. Neither one nor the other alone is sufficient to solve the many problems inherent in today's society. An emphasis on self-interest over the common good could lead to social reproduction of current stratification, unrealized economic potential for certain communities, and a harming of the environment. This bottom-line approach to educational accountability tends to decontextualize the learning process and learning outcomes. Differing cultures and varying learning styles are not carefully considered in this culture of measurement.

A student's performance in school depends upon many factors. School finance, teacher quality, adequate resources and materials, student's level of health and nutrition, family background, and home language, among others, all influence academic performance. However, the logic of high-stakes testing coupled with the today's

accountability requirements places the responsibility for student performance almost entirely on the individual and his or her family. One teacher put it this way:

> The numbers are from the people that are not in the classroom every single day. We who are here on a day-to-day basis—we see the little successes, the developmental successes. OK this child was having a tough time making it to school every day. Now every day they're on time. This child wasn't bringing in any homework. That's not an assessment but it's something the children are doing (Teacher, personal communication, October 18, 2006).

Individual effort and native talent are not the only factors responsible for academic success. Padilla (2005) explains:

> The culture of engagement, which places a premium on local context and negotiated social realities that seek to promote a more democratic community and greater equity in accessing resources, offers an alternative to the culture of measurement (p. 259).

If test scores are the sole measure of success, a school, regardless of purpose or design, is likely to be drawn into a high-stakes testing mentality and culture of measurement. One teacher explained:

> As long as the measures by which the school and children are evaluated are quantitative, I think, then, that trickles down to how the teachers do things and that's how you see things black and white, yes and no, pass or fail. I think what is more important is the individual children's minds—no two children are exactly the same (Teacher, personal communication, October 25, 2006).

The principal voiced similar concerns, pointing out that both achievement and accountability mean many things. Although some say accountability has to focus on passing the test, "accountability has a larger meaning. Managing all of this causes a great deal of anxiety for the teacher who may, as a result of this, tend to revert back to a very structured type of approach" (Principal, personal communication, February 11, 2005).

When the Elementary School principal assumed the position, she made it clear that she would generally follow the philosophical approach formulated by Henry Levin of Stanford University, which is referred to as Accelerated Schools (Principal, personal communication, October 13, 2004). Levin believes that disadvantaged children need enrichment and accelerated instruction, not remedial education. "Accelerated learning schools are designed to bring all students into the educational mainstream by building on their natural strengths, acknowledging the different experiences that they bring to the school setting and by consistently stressing higher expectations" (Jenkins & Keefe, 2001, p. 3). This approach encouraged a move away from a singular use of direct, explicit, and systematic instruction proposed by the founders of the School (University of Texas System, 2002a) to include others strategies that support constructivist learning.

The University Elementary School is pressured to show exemplary scores as a reflection of exemplary practice, to ensure students pass to the next grade, and to avoid closing doors to their futures. At the same time, however, the teachers and administrators are working hard to provide authentic, excellent education for a disadvantaged population. One teacher said:

> I worry about the teachers and how they're kind of juggling everything …which balls they are allowing to drop. The things that get viewed as most important, are the things that really, to me, aren't the most important and I think that the teachers start to get strapped …making sure they're implementing whatever …the new cultural diversity curriculum, a new Tier 2 math strategy …they really forget about the kids, and I think they forget about the idea of community in the classrooms and I think they forget about taking the extra time to spend 5 minutes to talk to a kid about their week-end or to interact with a parent or actually to enjoy the school day rather than push the curriculum down the kids' throats (Teacher, personal communication, October 25, 2006).

Moreover, another teacher added, “Success is measured differently by everyone. Then if they don’t pass that 3rd grade TAKS test, does that mean they are not going to be successful later on?” (Teacher, personal communication, October 18, 2006).

American schools place a heavy value on individual student achievement and mastery of cognitive learning goals (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998). The Elementary School is hampered by the extreme emphasis that is placed on the state tests by the external political environment. The School feels inordinately pressured to prove itself in the terms of the accountability results, at times disregarding what the School community believes is in the best interest of each child.

STUDENT VOICE

Students at the Elementary School have opportunities for meaningful control over many of their activities. Several teachers indicated during interviews that they plan for and constantly encourage student involvement and student expression. As the School added grades each year, the upper level grades requested greater student voice. For example, the fourth grade teachers and the school administration are currently planning for a student council. The administrator said:

> The fourth grade teachers and I had a conversation the other day—we want to start a student council. We’ve never had a fourth grade before. Fourth grade has now become the intermediate level. Now it’s time for them to have some citizenship. We need to have a student council (Administrator, personal communication, October 12, 2006).

From the development of rubrics for *keeping our desks clean* to deciding what is important in writing an essay, students at the Elementary School show interest and pride

in how their work is performed and how it is assessed (Author, personal observation, January 2007).

> In 2nd grade we have things that we vote on. We enable them to make decisions and voice their opinions. For example, I ask, what books would you like to read today? And then, if I am faced with a behavior issue, I always put it back on the child. I ask, "If you were the teacher, how would you handle this?" (Teacher, personal communication, October 18, 2006)

Positive teacher attitudes and high expectations of participation in group and cooperative activities help students develop their character and skills for active engagement (Solomon et al., 1997). This notion is not a new concept. John Dewey (1916) wrote that students need to experience collaboration, deliberation, decision-making, and democratically designed communities if they are to learn how to participate actively in our democracy as adults. A teacher noted that the students have "opportunities to reflect and make better choices" (Teacher, personal communication, October 18, 2006). Another said:

> It's better to effect change as a group. I don't think it should just be the principal's decision. I think it should be a collective decision. I think this school and all schools should be for the children.…I think we should *include parents and community and even the children in decision making* [italics added] when we want to change something (Teacher, personal communication, October 27, 2006).

Learning is frequently co-constructed and always socially constructed. Our language, the way issues and ideas are framed, and the manner in which children learn and explain to one another how they came to a particular conclusion are all critical to an understanding of how children learn and how educators relate to children as learners. For example, at the Elementary School, math learning and teaching are supported through a balanced approach, including direct instruction and cognitively guided instruction (CGI)

(Carpenter, Fennema, Franke, Levi, & Empson, 1999). Both require a caring, supportive relationship between student and teacher, but the CGI method is a particularly good example of how students can help one another co-construct their understanding. Using CGI, the teacher poses a problem. The students work either alone or in groups to solve the problem. The teacher then asks selected students to explain how they understand the problem and how they have tried to solve it. Students construct their understanding, developing concepts, applying principles, and using their tools of calculation (Carpenter et al., 1999). This strategy is just one example of how *student voice* is helpful and supportive of education for all the children. Students need to share their ideas and be heard.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL CLIMATE

Classroom teachers, who truly focus on the children and their multiple needs, know that engaging students in a feeling of community helps encourage and motivate them toward high academic and social-emotional achievement. At the Elementary School, the teachers have a deep feeling of respect for diversity and inclusiveness in the School. One teacher explained why she wanted to teach at the School:

> The family involvement was a big thing for me because growing up, my parents were English Language Learners so I felt that my family was not involved in my schooling other than I came home and I had homework and it was like my parents went to school when they could but there was not that connection unless I was in trouble, of course (Teacher, personal communication, October 17, 2006).

Language barriers can challenge even the most gifted teachers. As the principal explained in a comment about reading instruction, "Some kids don't hear the sounds…especially if the student comes from a different culture, or is coming from a culture where there is not a lot of conversation" (Principal, personal communication, October 6, 2006). A teaching approach or strategy is heavily influenced by the nature of the student population. The principal said, "As a principal, I want to hear about what another principal is doing with a similar demographic. What works with certain demographics may not work with others" (Principal, personal communication, October 6, 2006). Please consult Appendix A for information on the School's demographics.

People are working together for one common goal: to provide exemplary education for each and every child. A university professor described it as, "There is a deep sense of caring for the children. You just get that feeling when you walk into the School. The kids are valued, respected, and they are liked. They are just thriving in this environment" (Treviño, 2006, p. 155).

Learning how to cooperate with others, how to resolve conflicts, how to problem-solve and manage stress are important to the students and their families. Students at the Elementary School are building resiliency and learning citizenship through character education in each classroom. Teaching conflict resolution helps reinforce a student's level of social ability, which is critical to resilience (Wright & Masten, 2003; Yates, Egeland, & Sroufe, 2003). Research shows that this approach is highly successful (Caprara, Barbarenelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000; DiPerna & Elliot, 1999).

The School climate has been described as fresh and exciting (Treviño, 2006). There is an evident energy, enthusiasm, and drive toward a common goal that provides a sense of hope. Treviño (2006) quotes one math professor as saying, "There is an optimistic spirit that they are on the right track, on a nice trajectory. There is … an enthusiasm for the School and for learning" (p. 160). Beyond the hard work, many faculty and staff point to the joy and fun in learning. "I think our students should really enjoy learning. If they keep it up, they'll keep on learning—they'll become life-long learners" (Teacher, personal communication, January 10, 2007).

The University Elementary School offers an environment in which each person is a valued member of the School community. A School administrator describes the parents as very involved. "They chose to be here" (Administrator, personal communication, October 12, 2006). A teacher said:

> I think parents are the primary teachers of the child. I only have their children for one year while the parents are there for their whole lives. They are the primary teachers so I don't want to overstep any of the family values (Teacher, personal communication, October 27, 2006).

"They greet each other by hugging. Teachers hug the parents; the principal hugs the parents. Everyone feels welcome" (Trevino, 2006, p. 158). Within this commitment and care are values of responsibility, hard work, and high expectations. The combination is powerful. In this way, the School represents a step toward reinstatement of the norms and values that Foster (2004) calls community, affiliation, and mutual interaction. Foster is concerned that the desire for local engagement is being replaced by a narrative supporting productivity, economics, consumerism, and technology. This apprehension was foreshadowed by Postman (1996) in his widely read book, *The End of Education*. In this

age of narrowly focused accountability, the Elementary School is providing a model of exemplary practice in instruction and administration that appears to be working well for these children.

Teacher and student beliefs, assumptions, and respect for one another are at the heart of what matters (Benard, 1993). These relationships help develop trust, which in turn helps to maintain the appropriate conditions for learning. Teachers make a conscious effort to build community, trust, and respect within their classrooms (Teacher, personal communication, May 2, 2005). A teacher said, "I believe if you really want to be a community leader, you need to reach out to all parts of the community in whatever ways that you can. Everyone has a gift and everyone has something to offer" (Teacher, personal communication, October 27, 2006). One School administrator expressed her view of parents as, "They want their children to do their very, very best" (Administrator, personal communication, October 12, 2006).

However, this idea does not mean that the School should abandon rules, procedures, and other regulative and normative structures and processes, but rather that it should espouse a priority on judgment against a universal application of rules (Foster, 2004). If exceptions need to be made or special care and support given due to circumstances, the school leader must be free to do so.

Elementary School students come to school with differing histories, cultural experiences, family differences and similarities, and various proclivities and inclinations that may or may not be well received at school. "Our number one rule," one teacher explains, "is that we learn about each other's culture. When you have that understanding,

I think stereotypes tend to fade because stereotypes are basically your idea of something you know little about" (Teacher, personal communication, October 27, 2006). Education researchers are beginning to write about this cultural diversity in terms of assets, not deficits (Valencia, 1997). Rather than see these children's home lives only in relation to poverty and dysfunction, Moll and others have written about the knowledge and skills in local households as living knowledge and as cultural resources for thinking (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, Tapia, & Whitmore, 1993). In honoring these resources, the School engages family members to help students learn about different occupations, how to perform various tasks, and how to achieve skills for living. Engaging the community in this way encourages teachers, administrators, and others to focus on the assets the children bring to the School, rather than their deficits. One teacher reported:

> I'm Lebanese, and I tell my students a lot of stories about my family and my experiences, and I allow them in turn to tell me about their experiences. For example, we were doing fairytales. We read about Cinderella. Then we read about the Persian Cinderella. We read from different cultures so that they could understand that not only here do we have fairytales. The main rule that I think is important at our School is the sense of culture and involvement and community. So I bring it down to my classroom. And they're all equally important (Teacher, personal communication, October 27, 2006).

The teachers represent a broad range of cultural heritages. Currently there are teachers from Lebanon, Vietnam, Puerto Rico, and Mexico. Additionally, three are African-American, and three are male. The typical teacher in public elementary schools is white and female. The Elementary School has a first grade position shared by two Anglo females.

The Elementary School is committed to culturally responsive pedagogy and diversity. In an attempt to help bridge a cultural divide, it overtly honors and appreciates

the ethnic diversity of its community. The School's policy manual recites, "We recognized the value of respect and connection with people who have different religious beliefs or practices. We understood that our entire School community would benefit by reaching out to our community members and learning from them" (University of Texas Elementary School, 2006a, p. 48).

HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

As discussed earlier, the students and faculty alike are held to a high standard. High expectations are part of the School culture. Setting and communicating high expectations is considered a *protective mechanism* for promoting resilience in students. The instrumental nature of upholding high standards underscores the potent impact that educator expectations can have on student performance outcomes (Good, 1981; Rosenthal & Rubin, 1978; Wang & Haertel, 1995).

Sometimes it is difficult for adults and children to maintain high expectations of one another. When preconceived notions of incompetence are validated, negative biases are strengthened. But the research on expectations is undisputed: high expectations evoke strong results; low expectations evoke weak results. It is imperative to maintain high standards for all our students regardless of their backgrounds.

In speaking with the teachers at the Elementary School, it is clear that they are well aware of the high standards to which they are held. One teacher explained what is expected of her:

> As a professional here, I'm expected by the administration to comply with all policies and procedures. I'm expected to take initiative on things on my own if there's an area that I think needs to be addressed or if there's something I want to know more about a group of kids that needs help with things…. I'm expected to find an answer or possible help…. I'm expected to go to school and get my graduate degree. I'm expected to form relationships with people at the University level. I'm expected to make sure kids meet state standards and are able to perform on state testing as well as any kind of other assessment measures that we use at the school (Teacher, personal communication, October 25, 2006).

The School is a demonstration site of best practice, and in this capacity the School has many stakeholders and expectations of excellence placed upon it. The teacher quoted above cited the importance of developing relationships with the University. This illustration is one example of how a teaching position at the Elementary School differs from most elementary school teaching jobs. An administrator at the School noted, "I don't think you would be a good fit to this school if you don't have high expectations of yourself" (Treviño, 2006, p. 159).

Students are always encouraged to do their best. This message is repeated daily. "Children were treated with high expectations and expected to be successful, and so they were" (Treviño, 2006, p. 145). Delpit (1996) writes that teachers' high expectations can structure and guide student behavior and challenge students beyond what they believe they can do. That combined with caring is indeed a powerful combination.

THE SCHOOL'S RESEARCH BASE

When asked about what best practices really are, the principal said, "I feel like what I have is practical experience in what works and what doesn't work, and I've gotten

very frustrated at people that are outside of campuses making the decisions of what works and what doesn't work" (Principal, personal communication, October 13, 2004). She explained that her concept of best practices includes what works in her school, not simply what has been handed down by the experts. She said: "The question really is what is the research base? The mission here is not just to use the research base, but to say it works or doesn't work—to say *how it works for us*" (Principal, personal communication, October 6, 2006). The principal asked:

> Do we want the Provost Office to come in and say this is what your task is? Do we want the College of Education to say this is what we want you to do? Or do we want it to evolve from the teachers here, from the staff . . . from the community, from the parents . . . and I think what's nice about our situation is it's not being a formal agenda. I think the teachers, when they were interviewed were already feeling like it was someone else's agenda, you know, the reading program, you know, whose research are we going to use and so forth. I think that they're needing some more time now that they're kind of settled in after the first year to be thinking about what that agenda is going to be. I think it needs to come from the needs we see within the classroom, the students. So issues of discipline and safety, issues of health and nutrition, issues of cultural diversity, and even issues of character education. Those are all things that have emerged from our work here in East Austin with these kids. So those will be the areas that are in our campus plan for us to get committees together and to, you know, to delve into best practices (Principal, personal communication, October 13, 2004).

Learning Communities or Communities of Professional Practice

Teachers at the Elementary School share a strong sense of purpose and norms of individual and organizational learning. Several of the teachers expressed a sense of responsibility for the learning of all students, not simply the ones in their classrooms. The teachers rely on one another for much of their learning, and several teachers are master's or doctoral students at the University. Research supports this characterization as a

learning community or community of professional practice. “Our research suggests that human resources—such as openness to improvement, trust and respect, teachers having knowledge and skills, supportive leadership and socialization—are more critical to the development of professional community than structural conditions” (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994, p. 4). The administration plans regular retreats and joint training for the teachers so that they may practice collective inquiry and share personal practice.

Sometimes there are obstacles to learning due to normative or cultural isomorphism. In the case of the Elementary School, the institutional scripts that lend a sense of legitimacy emanate from deeply embedded professional norms, state and federal regulatory systems, and long-standing socially approved practices. The teachers are all public school teachers, either with experience in the local school system or trained by the sponsoring University. This traditional cultural embeddedness is what Rowan and Miskel (1999) call the “grammar of schooling” (p. 368). To overcome some of the obstacles to creating a new way of learning and teaching, it is necessary to suspend judgment, listen to others deeply, and communicate honestly about issues that are often taken for granted on an institutional level (Rusch, 2005). According to Weick and Westley, “Organizing and learning are essentially antithetical processes, which means the phrase ‘organizational learning’ qualifies as an oxymoron. To learn is to disorganize and to increase variety. To organize is to forget and reduce variety” (Weick & Westley, 1996, p. 440). An organization needs to be able to be flexible, agile, and ready to learn. To do this, it is necessary at times for the institution within which the organization is embedded to be similarly open to change and to learning.

REFLECTION ON THE CURRENT ACCOUNTABILITY MOVEMENT

The current model of accountability is too narrow. It has emerged from a business interest in helping the education community learn how to streamline and re-engineer the institution of schooling. The use of a single test or set of tests is not a fair assessment of a student's learning or of a school's performance. The narrowly drawn program exposes the system to cheating and corruption. A more equitable model would include authentic, portfolio type assessments (Valenzuela, 2005). Valenzuela (2005) has written persuasively that "accountability can and should be consistent with the use of locally derived, authentic assessments, academic rigor, and rich learning experiences " (p. 17). Today's accountability system actually does little to change deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997) and may be a partial cause of increased dropouts and in-class retention (particularly in the 9th grade). The strong focus on narrow outcomes has had a corrupting effect on the nature of classroom teaching and school quality. In addition to test scores, and other assessments, the system should look deeply at inputs such as equitable resource distribution, responsiveness to cultural and linguistic challenges, and curriculum that is open to diverse cultures and ways of thinking.

NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

As Cuban has written, we are *reforming again, and again, and again* (Cuban, 1990). Why do so few reforms take root and grow? The federal government has declared that even with scientifically based reading approaches, children are still not improving

their reading, and teachers are not improving their reading instruction. Why is that the case? The University Elementary School was founded as a demonstration site because the TEA could not identify a single school in Texas that could serve as a model of how reading instruction should be accomplished (Education Consultant, personal communication, September 29, 2004).

Something more is going on that is keeping schools from significantly improving education for disadvantaged populations. Using New Institutional Theory helps us understand the incredible and nearly invisible pervasiveness of resistance to change that is exemplified by norms of what a real school looks like and by mindsets that vary tremendously by subculture or grouping. There appears to be a major mismatch between the policy promulgated in No Child Left Behind and the education needs of today's disadvantaged populations. We need to use our knowledge of institutions and how they shape organizations and individuals in order to see whether the cultural conditions are well served by the policy emanating from the federal government. The quality of education should be assessed at the local level in contrast to the one-size-fits-all standards currently in place. This approach would not preclude federal oversight, but it would have to be based on a broader array of phenomena than test scores.

Charter schools are considered by many analysts to be schools of choice with an emphasis on consumer selection in a market economy. This neo-liberal viewpoint supports the original conception of the Elementary School embodied in the application to the State Board of Education. However, the School has developed in a very different way that recognizes chartering as an option for local families and educators who want to

create a new way of teaching and learning. One of the Elementary School's teachers foresees "a shift in what we feel is important and what we know about teaching and learning. We need to go back to what we really believe about learning and about teaching" (Teacher, personal communication, October 25, 2006). When charter schools were first conceived (Budde, 1988), the idea was one of autonomy in instructional design and organizational flexibility to meet the needs of particular communities. The charter school model was merely a mechanism. For many advocates, it was not meant to support the ideology of the free market. The Elementary School appears to be returning to this original conception. However, it is hampered by the high-stakes testing environment and may not fulfill its potential until accountability is redesigned to include a broader assessment of student learning and school performance.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND POLICY DESIGN

Comprehensive Nature of Education Research and Policy Design

This case study suggests several implications for the future of education research and education policy design. The comprehensive nature of the challenges in today's urban schools requires that policy design take into consideration a broader array of institutional actors than simply the schools themselves. Institutions that impact student achievement including the family, neighborhood, religious organizations, business, and community organizations must also be taken into account (Crowson & Boyd, 1993; Mawhinney & Smrekar, 1996). In the case of Elementary School, the University and the University System would have to be added to the list.

It is important to recognize the complexity of current policy and the multitude of policies that impact a given school at any one time (Chrispeels, 1997; Hatch, 2002; Honig & Hatch, 2004; Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001). While schools have always dealt with large numbers of complex and competing policies, the situation has progressed exponentially in terms of the differing strategies and underlying assumptions faced by demographically complex schools today (Hatch, 2002).

Multiple Groups and Policy Implementation

Policy design today is more likely than before to identify multiple groups who might be impacted by the policy, and be based on the implementation potential of various stakeholders such as parents, youth workers, social workers, health professionals, and human services providers, among others. In the case of the Elementary School, one might include the various departments and schools at the University that are involved in the school's implementation: Social Work, Nursing, Educational Psychology, College of Education, to name a few.

Frequently policy is implemented by individuals and groups not named formally in the policy. These stakeholders, such as business people, lobbyists, donors, and others, need to be considered in the policy design. Moreover, these implementing groups may be analyzed for variation in their attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions regarding the policy. Not all teachers, for example, regard a given policy in a given school in the same manner (Kruse et al., 1994). Spillane and others have shown that differing groups face differing

constraints and enablers in the process of implementation (Burch & Spillane, 2004; Honig, 2003; Spillane, 1999).

Learning theory directs scholars and researchers to consider the lens through which teachers and others understand new policies and practices. Pre-existing understanding, beliefs, assumptions, and experience impact how the policy or recommended practice is received (Jennings, 1996; Spillane, 2000; Spillane & Callahan, 2000; Spillane & Jennings, 1997). Spillane has found that frequently the teachers or implementers simply add on surface understandings to their existing practice (Spillane, 2000), making only superficial changes to how they deliver instruction. Deeper pedagogical principles are very difficult to communicate without improved professional training and more effective leadership.

Social Aspects of Teacher Learning

Policy implementation is impacted by the type of professional culture present in the schools, by what is encouraged or allowed by the district office, or in the case of the Elementary School, by the Management Board and the University. Several studies underscore teachers' professional communities or communities of practice as being critical to implementation (Little, 1982; Little, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Smylie & Hart, 1999). Teachers' organizational contexts and how they interact with one another have a significant impact on how they learn (Coburn, 2001; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Spillane, 1999).

In addition to professional culture and local structure, implementers are individuals with lives separate from their professional or functional roles in the education community. How they relate to one another on-site and off-site may provide useful insight into how ready they are to receive new policy. Research looking beyond the professional role may be important in predicting what works in a given policy architecture.

Policy and Research: Contested and Contingent

Policy design and implementation is a negotiated process, contingent and contested at many levels. Because policy is attempting to guide behavior that is at once misunderstood and also constantly changing, an understanding of the policy situation and process must be comprehensive. A factor here or a variable there may cause unintended consequences for other elements. A comprehensive theoretical view with frequent efforts at practical, street-level understanding should help reduce the discord and develop sustainability.

The institutional impact on the regulations, norms, values, cognitions, and subcultures in a policy community cannot be overstated. In the case of the Elementary School, the institutional impact of family, community, business, university, and state and federal governance have been large and powerful. Whether the regulative force will overcome the local cultural and cognitive forces is not known. All factors need to be considered and evaluated if the situation is to be understood thoroughly. Research must become more rigorously theoretical in addition to being practical and useful. Individuals'

interpretations are shaped by their cultures, organizations, professions, and social networks. Do policy premises correspond to actors' interests? The complexity is so strong that only by thinking comprehensively and theoretically will a clear view emerge of what is really happening in education today.

The one-size-fits-all mentality of the high-stakes testing accountability movement is not conducive to long-term success in the education policy arena. Policymakers must be sensitive to a great diversity of viewpoints and subcultures actively operating in an environment in order to develop policy that builds local capacity for increased learning and community engagement. Researching the perspectives of individual actors and groups at the local level helps policymakers leverage capacity in the community that is currently idle. In addition, researchers should clarify the institutional forces of policy development and procedures so that communities can more effectively build sustainable, equitable schools. Research regarding parent involvement might help us go beyond the circumscribed involvement that is present in most urban schools today. These are a few of the many areas that could be researched effectively using New Institutional Theory. The critical point, however, is that only by including greater numbers of stakeholders in the policy design efforts and in the implementation will the policy community be able to craft education policy *that works*.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The University Elementary School was created in an environment of regulation and compliance. It was intended to demonstrate the principles that spawned the now controversial No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. However, when the principal was hired, teachers were selected, and parents came to the fore, a community developed that eventually modified the original vision of the School to more clearly focus on each child in an atmosphere that combined high expectations of student achievement within a caring environment. The normative aspects of the School proved to be surprisingly salient. However, based on this research, the cultural cognitive elements of the school emerged as truly foundational to the development of the school community. The School's culture is one of learning at multiple levels—from the individual students and families, to the teachers and administrators who serve the School, to the extraordinary involvement of the University faculty and administration. The School is, indeed, a demonstration of how learning takes place and persists in the richness of the local school community and with the support and guidance of the University. For many of these children the motto of "From Pre-K to Ph.D." may well become a reality.

APPENDIX:

Demographics of the School and Service Area

UT Elementary School (2005-06)

Student Distribution	UTES	UTES	*Service Area Group	Austin ISD	Texas
African American	37	20.8%	23.7%	13.5%	14.7%
Hispanic	136	76.4%	72.8%	55.4%	45.3%
White	4	2.2%	3.0%	27.9%	36.5%
Native American	0	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%	0.3%
Asian/Pac. Islander	1	0.6%	0.4%	2.9%	3.1%
Economically Disadvantaged	111	62.4%	92.9%	60.3%	55.6%
Limited English Proficient (LEP)	12	6.7%	39.5%	23.9%	15.8%
Teacher Distribution					
African American	1.3	11.1%	14.9%	7.3%	9.1%
Hispanic	4.3	36.8%	36.2%	24.2%	20.1%
White	5.1	43.6%	47.3%	66.7%	69.4%
Native American	0.0	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.3%
Asian/Pac. Islander	1.0	8.5%	1.5%	1.7%	1.1%
Male	1.5	12.9%	13.2%	22.9%	22.9%
Female	10.1	87.1%	86.8%	77.1%	77.1%
Teacher Experience					
Beginning Teachers	1.5	12.8%	10.3%	8.1%	7.5%
1-5 Years Experience	2.0	17.1%	37.0%	30.3%	29.0%
6-10 Years Experience	5.8	49.6%	17.6%	19.3%	19.4%
11-20 Years Experience	1.1	9.4%	18.3%	21.2%	24.2%
Over 20 Years Experience	1.3	11.1%	16.9%	21.0%	19.9%
Students per Teacher (numbers only)	15.3	n/a	13.3	14.4	14.9

* Service Area Group: The 22 elementary schools in ZIP codes 78702, 78721, 78722, 78723, 78741 excluding UT Elementary School

Texas Education Agency: http://www.tea.tx.us/

University of Texas Elementary School
Service Area Demographics, Year 2000

	* Service Area	Austin	United States
Age			
Median Age	27.2	29.6	35.3
Under 5 years old	7.9%	7.1%	6.8%
5-18 years old	16.4%	15.4%	18.9%
Over 18 years old	75.7%	77.5%	74.3%
Race			
White	41.5%	65.4%	75.1%
African American	22.3%	10.0%	12.3%
American Indian	0.8%	0.6%	0.9%
Asian	2.7%	4.7%	3.6%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Some other race	29.4%	16.2%	5.5%
Two races	3.3%	3.0%	2.4%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
** Hispanic (of any race)	50.5%	30.5%	12.5%
Language (age 5+)			
Other than English spoken at home	47.6%	31.1%	17.9%
Education (age 25+)			
No high school diploma	37.1%	16.6%	19.6%
High school diploma or higher	62.9%	83.4%	80.4%
Bachelor's degree or higher	19.6%	40.4%	24.4%
Housing			
Occupied by renter	66.6%	55.2%	33.8%
Occupied by owner	33.4%	44.8%	66.2%
Median value owner-occupied homes	$75,763	$124,700	$119,600
Economics			
In labor force (age 16+)	66.9%	71.9%	63.9%
Families below poverty level	20.9%	9.1%	9.2%
Individuals below poverty level	28.3%	14.4%	12.4%
Median household income (1999$)	$28,115	$42,689	$41,994
Per capita income (1999$)	$13,665	$24,163	$21,587

* Service Area is inclusive of ZIP codes 78702, 78721, 78722, 78723, and 78741.

** U.S. Census now tracks Hispanic origin separately from race designations

Source: U.S. Census: http://factfinder.census.gov/

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VITA

Janice Marie Hansel was born in Pasadena, California on December 30, 1949, the daughter of Zenovia Hansel and Everett Marquette Hansel. She graduated from High School in Pomona, California, and received her undergraduate degree in August, 1973, from the University of California, Santa Cruz. In the early years, Janice worked on various research projects at Yale University. In 1983, she received and Master of Business Administration from New York University.

Janice has a broad work experience including teaching for a middle school and at the college level. Her experience also includes business management, public policy research, and program management for two large metropolitan Chambers of Commerce. At mid-career, Janice decided to focus on public school reform, drawing on her broad experience in the private and public sectors. To this end, she entered the Graduate School of the University of Texas in Educational Administration to earn a Ph.D. with a specialization in Education Policy and Planning. During that time, she worked as a Graduate Research Assistant and Research Associate, primarily for the new University of Texas Elementary Charter School.

Janice has presented many papers on the subject of New Institutional Theory and has co-authored a chapter in a handbook on the politics of education explaining how New Institutional Theory may be used to better understand public education today. Her research agenda includes using New Institutional Theory to help design more effective

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This dissertation was typed by the author.